

Distinctive Competencies: Taming the Marine “Corps-glomerate”

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Title: Distinctive Competencies: Taming the Marine “Corps-glomerate”

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Thesis: Catalyzed by a relatively generous supply of defense resources during the Cold War, the Marine Corps expanded and diversified its structure and operations. The continuing trend is contributing to an untenable situation as the security environment changes. This resembles a classic problem faced by the modern business conglomerate—that of *overdiversification*; yet, the Marine Corps has neither addressed nor resolved it satisfactorily.

Discussion:

Given the frequent encouragement by defense leaders to “adopt and adapt the lessons of the private sector,” it is worth considering private sector tools for strategic planning that might prove useful in adapting the Marine Corps’ strategic posture to its changing internal and external environments. Proven strategic planning techniques used in the private sector suggest that the Marine Corps should respond by refocusing its operations. This involves revalidating its core “businesses,” identifying its distinctive competencies, shedding capabilities unrelated to these competencies, refocusing resources on these competencies, and retailoring its organizational structure to amplify the strategy’s benefits.

Complex geostrategic events have altered the environment in which the Marine Corps operates, increasing the marginal costs associated with preparing forces, procuring equipment, and informing decisions. The *Goldwater-Nichols Department of Defense Reorganization Act of 1986* altered institutional imperatives within the Department of Defense (DOD), ensuring the primacy of the joint task force in military operations. This decreases the marginal benefits of service diversity. Moreover, the Marine Corps has grown more diverse through the Cold War, altering and broadening its focus with deleterious effect on its core functions. Much of its force structure has grown too large for amphibious operations. And evidence suggests that realistic training in amphibious operations has declined in this decade. The resulting inefficiencies manifest themselves in fiscal difficulty and, arguably, weakened readiness.

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The Marine Corps in the 1990s possesses a set of characteristics suggesting it is ripe for restructuring: (1) it is highly diversified, like many American firms; (2) it possesses an increasingly attractive core business, amphibious operations; (3) it is a “market leader” in its core business; (4) its performance is presently jeopardized by the dilution of investment to sustain numerous activities and capabilities. Overdiversification that contributes to declining performance demands strategic restructuring such as “downscoping,” the strategy of reducing the diversified scope of business activities to concentrate on core businesses and products. Downscoping in turn demands that the Marine Corps refocus its efforts and resources on its legally defined core functions: amphibious operations and security operations. Identifying and then emphasizing distinctive competencies is a means to this end, ensuring that the Marine Corps will cultivate and emphasize those resources that create competitive advantage in its core functions. To complement its efforts at refocusing, the Marine Corps must divest itself of capabilities unrelated to its core functions, especially those in which it holds no advantage when compared with its sister services. The Corps’ post-Cold War focus on sustained operations ashore is a logical candidate for divestment. Furthermore, it must restructure in a manner that facilitates refocusing on amphibious and security operations.

Conclusion(s) or Recommendation(s): *Operational Maneuver from the Sea* (OMFTS) represents a good conceptual step toward revitalizing amphibious warfare in the Marine Corps and, thus, toward downscoping. Similarly, the MV-22 Osprey, joint strike fighter, and advanced amphibious assault vehicle all represent good, if expensive, programmatic steps in this direction. However, the Corps must reduce further the scope of its capabilities and the shape of its force structure to concentrate resources in support of its principal Title 10 functions.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

In the 1960s...companies diversified widely and often wildly. Now conglomerates are keen to sell off many of their earlier acquisitions and to concentrate their efforts where the rate of return is highest.

—*The Economist*, May 2, 1981

Promoting the application of business management techniques to improve the operations of the Department of Defense (DOD) is *en vogue*. Reporting in 1995, the Commission on Roles and Missions of the Armed Forces argued that “DOD can benefit by adopting more of the innovative business practices used in the private sector.”¹ Likewise, Secretary of Defense William S. Cohen underscored the importance of translating the experiences of business in his 1997 report on the Quadrennial Defense Review:

We also need to take advantage of business process improvements being pioneered in the private sector. Over the past decade, the American commercial sector has reorganized, restructured, and adopted revolutionary new business and management practices in order to ensure its competitive edge in the rapidly changing global marketplace. It has worked. Now the Department must adopt and adapt the lessons of the private sector if our armed forces are to maintain their competitive edge.²

The list of equally vocal and distinguished exponents of this idea is lengthy. Yet, actual examples of adopting and adapting the lessons of the private sector are confined to the relatively arcane domains of acquisition and infrastructure management.

Clearly, DOD is not a business entity; and it would be naive to suggest that the lessons of the private sector apply universally or even directly to the challenges DOD faces in remaining effective and efficient. Still, it is difficult to resist Secretary Cohen’s proposition. Similarities

¹ Department of Defense, Commission on Roles and Missions of the Armed Forces, *Directions for Defense* (Washington, DC: Brassey’s, 1995), 3-1.

exist, for example, between the experiences of American business and the Marine Corps in relation to strategic planning—the process of deciding what a firm, or military service, does and how it goes about doing it. Furthermore, fiscal realities impinge on Marine Corps plans and policies as they do in the private sector.³

Acquisitive Corps

Catalyzed by a relatively generous supply of defense resources during the Cold War, the Marine Corps diversified its structure and operations, expanding their scope to provide a host of capabilities. The trend, which continues in the post-Cold War period, is contributing to an untenable situation as defense resources decline.⁴ Rapid geostrategic developments are changing the Marine Corps' external environment, while domestic fiscal pressures are straining its internal resources. Competition from the other services is

“DOWNSCOPING”

A national network of flour mills at its genesis in 1928, General Mills diversified aggressively in the 1960s and 1970s, eventually competing in thirteen varied industries including travel services, rare coins and stamps, children's toys and games, specialty retailing, home furnishings and family restaurants. Its financial and personnel resources were spread across a broad array of unrelated business activities. By the mid-1980s the firm's performance figures reached a fifteen-year low. Recognizing its problems, General Mills restructured aggressively, transforming itself from a widely diversified company competing in thirteen industries to a narrowly focused one competing in only two: consumer foods and restaurants.

Within four years of refocusing its activities, General Mills' performance improved substantially. Its return on sales increased from 2.7 percent to 7.4 percent, while its return on equity jumped from -7.1 percent to 56.6 percent. Simultaneously, the firm's stock price more than doubled. General Mills' results are typical of many successful restructuring decisions taken by U.S. corporations in the 1980s.

heated in the context of a declining national security “market.” For many, a vague, intuitive feeling that the Marine Corps is “doing too much” accompanies these developments.

This situation resembles a classic problem faced by the modern business conglomerate—that of overdiversification; yet, the Marine Corps has neither addressed nor resolved it

² William S. Cohen, *Report of the Quadrennial Defense Review*, May 1997 (Washington, DC: GPO, 1997), ix.

³ In response to the results of the Quadrennial Defense Review, the Marine Corps performed two Force Structure Reviews in 1997, implicit acknowledgment that it must restructure. The groups' charters included the need to “cut costs without cutting capabilities.” This is akin to the “downsizing” model of restructuring pursued—with only isolated success—by some corporations in the 1980s.

satisfactorily. Given the frequent encouragement by defense leaders to “adopt and adapt the lessons of the private sector,” what business tools for strategic planning might prove useful in shaping the Marine Corps’ strategic posture for the future?

Theoretical Foundations

Economic theory and empirical evidence suggest that a firm’s ability to diversify optimally is a function of its external environment and internal characteristics.⁵ Firms typically seek to diversify to a point at which the difference between the marginal costs and benefits of diversification is zero. This approach maximizes the firm’s performance. Theory and evidence also indicate, however, that firms sometimes find themselves in an overdiversified position.⁶ This can result from change in or mismanagement of the internal characteristics of the firm. Likewise, alteration of the external environment can throw optimally diversified firms out of equilibrium. Overdiversification may result,⁷ leading to poor performance and resulting in the

⁴ See chapters by Robert W. Gaskin, Andrew F. Krepinevich, and Mackubin T. Owens in Williamson Murray, ed., *Brassey’s Merishon American Defense Annual 1995-1996* (Washington, DC: Brassey’s, 1995).

⁵ Several extensively researched analyses of diversification strategy exist. See, for example, Constantinos C. Markides, *Diversification, Refocusing, and Economic Performance* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1995), 8-10, 12-35; Robert E. Hoskisson and Michael A. Hitt, *Downsizing: How to Tame the Diversified Firm* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 82-88, 125-134; and Marilyn L. Taylor, *Divesting Business Units: Making the Decision and Making It Work* (Lexington, MA: Lexington Books, 1988), 21-31, 39.

⁶ Markides, *Diversification*, 17-28.

⁷ For a variety of reasons, including (1) strategic mismanagement, (2) an increase in diversification costs, or (3) a reduction in diversification benefits, a firm may find itself in an overdiversified position, resulting in declining performance. The empirical record shows that restructuring by divesting unrelated businesses or products and, perhaps, acquiring related ones contributes to improved performance. This “refocusing,” or “downsizing,” refers to the strategy of reducing the diversified scope of business activities to concentrate on “core” businesses or products. See Markides, *Diversification*, 8-10, 12-35.

requirement for some form of strategic restructuring such as “refocusing,”⁸ or “downscoping.”⁹

Reinforcing this theory, the academic literature and business press have amply documented the evolution of the diversified firm in America.¹⁰ Following World War II only about 30 percent of the Fortune 500 companies derived a majority of revenue from diversified business activities. This figure was estimated at 63 percent by 1974.¹¹ Statistical evidence indicates that the diversified scope of American business eventually peaked in the early 1980s.¹² Corporate America’s relatively widespread restructuring during the middle and late 1980s represented a strategic response to the aggressive diversification of the preceding two decades, the changing market conditions following the oil crises, and the increasing globalization of business activity. In short, many of America’s businesses restructured in response to the changing parameters of their respective external and internal situations.

Downscoping, which proved an effective strategy for many American firms in similar circumstances in the 1980s, can facilitate the Marine Corps’ strategic adaptation in the post-Cold War 1990s. For the Marine Corps, this involves revalidating its core “businesses,” identifying its distinctive competencies, shedding capabilities unrelated to these competencies, refocusing resources on these competencies, and retailoring its organizational structure to amplify the strategy’s benefits.

⁸ Markides, *Diversification*, 2.

⁹ Hoskisson and Hitt, *Downscoping*, 3.

¹⁰ See Alfred D. Chandler, *Strategy and Structure: Chapters in the History of American Industrial Enterprise* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1962); Richard P. Rumelt, *Strategy, Structure, and Economic Performance* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1974); and Michael Gort, *Diversification and Integration in American Industry* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1962).

¹¹ Rumelt, 146-148.

¹² Markides, *Diversification*, 6.

Plan of Attack

This paper offers one solution to the first half of the strategic planning problem: choosing what to do. To limit the scope of this investigation, it purposely omits consideration of the second: deciding how to do it. Applying a selection of established strategic planning techniques, it derives several policy implications and recommendations relating to the Marine Corps' strategic posture in the emerging national and international security environments. Chapter 2 addresses evolving global security conditions, assessing their impact on the Marine Corps. Chapter 3 examines the Cold War and post-Cold War growth and diversification of the Marine Corps, using the Marine Expeditionary Force as a microcosm to highlight the broader contemporaneous evolution in the internal characteristics of the Marine Corps. Building on the main ideas of the preceding chapters, Chapter 4 assesses the Marine Corps' strategic posture and suggests a strategic response to its evolving external environment and changing internal circumstances. Finally, Chapter 5 summarizes the findings of the preceding chapters and highlights the risks of inaction.

CHAPTER 2

“MARKET” MADNESS

Bismarckian Redux or Twenties Reflux?

In the aftermath of the Cold War, the global security environment is both uncertain and unstable.¹³ Numerous regions show signs of becoming arenas for energetic—perhaps dangerous—competition. Economic growth and political developments in the Asia-Pacific region, which is increasingly important to the United States, are providing both the means and the motives for renewed conflict.¹⁴ While the core of Europe enjoys relative calm, its periphery is manifestly unstable as exemplified by the ethnic conflict plaguing the Balkans, the nationalist fervor afflicting many of the former Soviet states, and the religious strife gripping much of the Maghreb.¹⁵ Moreover, Iran and Iraq continue to demonstrate dangerous, aggressive, and expansionist tendencies despite the U. S. policy of dual containment in Southwest Asia.¹⁶

The emerging geopolitical tableau invites historical comparison with the world situations in both the 1890s and the 1920s. The end of the Cold War permitted the renaissance of a multipolar

¹³ Assessments of the present and future international security environment abound. See, for example, Kenneth N. Waltz, “The Emerging Structure of International Politics,” *International Security* 18, no. 2 (Fall 1993): 44-79; and Richard L. Kugler, *Toward a Dangerous World: U. S. National Security Strategy for the Coming Turbulence*, MR-485-JS (Santa Monica, CA: Rand, 1995). For a concise official assessment, see Department of Defense, Institute for National Strategic Studies, *Strategic Assessment 1997: Flashpoints and Force Structure* (Washington, DC: National Defense University Press, 1997).

¹⁴ Aaron L. Friedberg, “Ripe for Rivalry: Prospects for Peace in a Multipolar Asia,” *International Security* 18, no. 3 (Winter 1993/1994): 5-33; Michael T. Klare, “The Next Great Arms Race,” *Foreign Affairs* 72, no. 3 (Summer 1993): 136-152.

¹⁵ John Ravenhill, “The New Disorder in the Periphery,” in *The Post-Cold War Order: Diagnoses and Prognoses*, eds. Richard Leaver and James L. Richardson (Canberra: Allen & Unwin, 1993), 69-80.

¹⁶ Zbigniew Brzezinski, Brent Scowcroft, and Richard Murphy, “Differentiated Containment,” *Foreign Affairs* 76, no. 3 (May/June 1997): 20-30.

international system. Many argue that the resulting potential for conflict and competition today resembles that characteristic of Bismarck's Europe or Eurasia following World War I, but on a global scale.¹⁷ Yet, the unprecedented variety of global competitors, coupled with the increasing lethality and availability of military hardware, presents the nation—and by extension the Marine Corps—with a considerably altered, particularly difficult, and historically unique security environment.

Theoretical Considerations

Optimal diversification is partly a function of the firm's external environment, as was introduced in Chapter 1. Overdiversification can result for a variety of external reasons which fall into two main groups: *decreased benefits* and *increased costs* of diversification. The marginal benefits of diversification decrease when the external environment changes and becomes more capable of providing some of the advantages previously reserved to the diversified firm. For example, improved external capital and information markets tend to decrease the benefits associated with the internal capital and information markets of the firm.¹⁸

Similarly, the marginal costs of diversification may increase as a result of a variety of external phenomena, the most apparent being related to increases in the volatility and uncertainty

¹⁷ See Charles W. Kegley, Jr. and Gregory A. Raymond, *A Multipolar Peace: Great-Power Politics in the Twenty-First Century* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1994), 60-64; Henry Kissinger, *Diplomacy* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1994), 23-28, 805; Zbigniew K. Brzezinski, *Out of Control: Global Turmoil on the Eve of the Twenty-First Century* (New York: Scribner's, 1993), 147-200; Paul Kennedy, *Preparing for the Twenty-First Century* (New York: Random House, 1993), 329-335; Josef Joffe, "How America Does It," *Foreign Affairs* 76, no. 5 (September/October 1997): 13-27; and John Gerard Ruggie, "The Past as Prologue?" *International Security* 21, no. 4 (Spring 1997): 89-125.

¹⁸ See, for example, Oliver E. Williamson, *Markets and Hierarchies: Analysis and Antitrust Implications* (New York: The Free Press, 1975).

in the external environment.¹⁹ Intuitively, the management difficulties of a highly diversified firm multiply quickly in a more complex, varied, and changing strategic environment. Errors in management are more likely under this scenario.

External factors such as these, alone or in combination, shift the point of optimal diversification and, hence, carry the potential to provoke overdiversification in business. Might the Marine Corps confront similar changes in its environment with similar consequences?

“Market” Conditions

The world ahead offers an unfamiliar environment for the conduct of international relations and military operations. A complex combination of cultural, demographic, economic, social, political, institutional, and technological currents is shaping both present and future strategic landscapes. While it is difficult to characterize the strategic environment simply, examination of several of its key features is sufficient to reveal its probable consequences. *Geostrategic Fog*. First, the emerging environment is characterized by increased danger, increased uncertainty, and decreased clarity.²⁰ The disappearance of a unifying threat, the increasing variety of international actors, the rapid pace of economic development, and the widening proliferation of sophisticated technology combine to create a strategic context in which anticipation is difficult and prediction is impossible. In the post-Cold War, a Clauswitzian “fog”

¹⁹ C. K. Prahalad and Richard A. Bettis, “The Dominant Logic: A New Linkage Between Diversity and Performance,” *Strategic Management Journal* 7, no. 6 (November-December 1986): 485-501; and Dennis C. Mueller, “A Life Cycle Theory of the Firm,” *Journal of Industrial Economics* 20, no. 3 (July 1972): 199-219.

²⁰ INSS, *Strategic Assessment 1997*, 1-3. For a sampling of the ongoing debate, see Joseph S. Nye, Jr., “What New World Order?” *Foreign Affairs* 71, no. 2 (Spring 1992): 83-96; Anne-Marie Slaughter, “The Real New World Order,” *Foreign Affairs* 76, no. 5 (September/October 1997): 183-197; and Peter F. Drucker, “The Global Economy and the Nation-State,” *Foreign Affairs* 76, no. 5 (September/October 1997): 159-171. For an opposing viewpoint, see G. John Ikenberry, “The Myth of the Post-Cold War Chaos,” *Foreign Affairs* 75, no. 3 (May/June 1996): 79-91.

covers the realm of grand strategy, disassembling the strategic objectives, intentions, and designs of allies and adversaries alike. The post-Cold War replacement of threat-based forces by capabilities-based forces reflects the defense establishment's recognition of this phenomenon. Unable to articulate the threat, the Department of Defense (DOD) opts instead to field the capabilities it *thinks* it needs. In this context, service-level decisionmaking is more complex and thus more costly; adequate and accurate information on which to base policy and programs is more difficult to gather, analyze, and integrate.

Compounding Interests. Second, America's global interests are growing in breadth and complexity, increasing the difficulty in making and executing grand strategy. Arguing in *Foreign Affairs* that "culture and creed" traditionally provided the identity necessary to determine national interests, Samuel P. Huntington remarks:

The end of the Cold War and social, intellectual, and demographic changes in American society have brought into question the validity and relevance of both traditional components of American identity. Without a sure sense of national identity, Americans have become unable to define their national interests, and as a result subnational commercial interests and transnational and nonnational ethnic interests have come to dominate foreign policy.²¹

Huntington dubs this phenomenon the "erosion" of national interests, underscoring their inevitable diminution and eventual disappearance. This seems unlikely. Indeed, he highlights a phenomenon better characterized as the mutation of America's global interests; right or wrong, commercial and ethnic interests are displacing more traditional national interests because of their profound international impacts and ramifications.

Certainly, the end of the Cold War, together with the concomitant reduction in direct political and military threats to the United States, contributed to the increasing attention to and

²¹ Samuel P. Huntington, "The Erosion of American National Interests," *Foreign Affairs* 76, no. 5 (September/October 1997): 29.

importance of the nation's commercial interests. In November 1992, then President-elect William Clinton highlighted this trend by proposing—though never creating—an “Economic Security Council,” homologue to the National Security Council, to coordinate pursuit and expansion of the nation's economic interests.²² Moreover, the pursuit of economic security²³ now occupies a principal position in the national security strategy.²⁴ Global economic preponderance, foreign market access, stable international finance, and reliable commercial infrastructure are among today's national interests.

Far from “eroding,” these economic interests are multiplying and broadening with the expansion and integration of the global economy.²⁵ The growth of the nation's aggregate foreign trade serves as a rough indicator of the growing integration of the U. S. economy with the world's economies. Between 1976 and 1996, the nation's total exports doubled, rising from 5.9 percent to 12 percent of gross domestic product (GDP). Similarly, total imports increased

²² The administration ultimately dropped the reference to “security,” establishing instead the new National Economic Council; nevertheless, the increased emphasis on economic interests remains clear. For a description of the original proposal and a sampling of the ensuing debate, see Michael K. Frisby, “Clinton Team Plans Council on Economy,” *Boston Globe*, 9 November 1992, 1+; Michael K. Frisby and Peter G. Gosselin, “Clinton Weighs Economic Panel to Oversee Cabinet,” *Boston Globe*, 10 November 1992, 1+; David Wessel, “Economic Security Council Stirs Debate,” *Wall Street Journal*, 10 November 1992, Sec. A2+; Charles E. Schumer, “Economic Security Rates Higher Status,” *New York Times*, 3 December 1992, Sec. A24; and Peter W. Rodman, “The Danger of Putting Economics First,” *Washington Post*, 18 December 1992, Sec. A31.

²³ According to Rand, “economic security is the ability to protect or to advance...economic interests *in the face of* events, developments, or actions that may threaten or block these interests.” See C. R. Neu and Charles Wolf, Jr., *The Economic Dimensions of National Security*, MR-466-OSD (Santa Monica, CA: Rand, 1994), 11-12.

²⁴ It is one of three “core objectives” in the national security strategy. See William J. Clinton, *A National Security Strategy for a New Century*, May 1997 (Washington, DC: GPO, 1997), 5, 14-19.

²⁵ Department of Commerce, U. S. International Trade Administration, *The Big Emerging Markets: 1996 Outlook and Sourcebook* (Lanham, MD: Bernan Press, 1995), 18-49; Commission on United States-Pacific Trade and Investment Policy, *Building American Prosperity in the 21st Century* (Washington, DC: GPO, 1997), 1-5, 9-14; James R. Golden, “Economics and National Strategy: Convergence, Global Networks, and Cooperative Competition,” in *Order and Disorder After the Cold War*, ed. Brad Roberts (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1995), 293-304; and Murray Weidenbaum, “The Business Response to the Global Marketplace,” in *Order and Disorder After the Cold War*, ed. Brad Roberts (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1995), 313-325.

steadily from 6.9 to 13.6 percent of GDP during the same period.²⁶ Moreover, the nation's trade is more widely distributed around the world than was the case twenty years ago. While North American, European, and North East Asian nations dominated the list of America's top trading partners twenty years ago, today China, Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand, Brazil, Venezuela, and Saudi Arabia have joined the list of the country's foremost economic interlocutors.²⁷

In short, the commercialization of security strategy promises to expand, not erode, the definition of "vital national interest," ultimately subjecting security policy to the vagaries of the business cycle and ensuring that soldiers will follow salesmen around the world. And the sheer variety in type and location of these interests promises to increase the cost associated with their protection.

Ascendant Competitors. In addition to the expansion of global interests, the United States must confront a third feature of the emerging environment: an expansion of competition around the world. This competition promises to take many forms and, ultimately, to challenge American national security. First, the United States can expect increasing economic competition, not only in terms of sheer size but also in terms of access to finances, resources, products, and markets. Studies confirm the likelihood of continued decline in the size of the U. S. economy relative to its global competitors,²⁸ which reduces the nation's ability to shape the international economic landscape in its favor and enhances the abilities of others to do so.

²⁶ Department of Commerce, U. S. International Trade Administration, "GDP and U. S. International Trade in Goods and Services, 1970-96," downloaded from Internet site <http://www.ita.doc.gov/industry/otea/usfth/tabcon.html>, 12 January 1998.

²⁷ ITA, *Big Emerging Markets*, 18-49; Department of Commerce, U. S. International Trade Administration, "Top 50 Partners in Total U. S. Trade in 1990-96," downloaded from Internet site <http://www.ita.doc.gov/industry/otea/usfth/tabcon.html>, 12 January 1998.

²⁸ Charles Wolf, Jr., and others, *Long-Term Economic and Military Trends 1994-2015*, MR-627-OSD (Santa Monica, CA: Rand, 1995), 8, 11, 17-21.

Moreover, this ultimately translates into a probable decline in the relative military advantage the United States currently enjoys,²⁹ since military might originates in economic strength.³⁰

A relative decline in U. S. economic and military might is likely to embolden competitors, in turn increasing competition across the spectrum of economic activity. Emerging economic peers might challenge the United States for access to and control of financial resources, natural resources, finished products, and global markets. This is not meant to suggest that armed conflict will stem directly from economic issues such as protectionism or currency trading; but as global economic relationships change and global economic competition increases, these issues will accentuate the tension among nations, which may lead to greater incidence of armed conflict as the United States seeks to cultivate and protect its global interests.

The United States can also expect increasing political and military competition in the future. As noted above, the potential for military strength resides in economic prosperity. As international trade promotes the accumulation of new public and private wealth in regions around the world, aspirants to regional hegemony will increasingly resort to enhanced military means in accomplishing their political objectives. Trends in the proliferation and quality of advanced armaments, the nature and degree of military readiness, and the balance and imbalance of military power around the world forecast a marked increase in military competition.³¹ The anarchy of the international system compels sovereign nations to arm themselves and stimulates

²⁹ Wolf and others, 17.

³⁰ Neu and Wolf, 37.

³¹ Kugler, 161-162. See also Lawrence Freedman, "The 'Proliferation Problem' and the New World Order," in *Non-Conventional Weapons Proliferation in the Middle East*, eds. Efraim Karsh, Martin S. Navias and Philip Sabin (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), 175-177; Yezid Sayigh, "Middle Eastern Stability and the Proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction," in *Non-Conventional Weapons Proliferation in the Middle East*, eds. Efraim Karsh, Martin S. Navias and Philip Sabin (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), 185-189; Friedberg, 5-33; and Klare, 136-152.

military competition.³² The development of military capacity in both Iran and Iraq provides a convincing example of how economic prosperity—in this case, tied to oil profits—promotes military competition.³³ The continuing growth and integration of the global economy will contribute to political and military competition, further increasing the frequency and range of armed conflict.

Finally, despite assertions to the contrary,³⁴ the United States will continue to encounter ideological competition, albeit perhaps in altered forms. For example, differing principles of social welfare increasingly put the United States at odds with many of its traditional European allies in the realm of international affairs. Likewise, differing religious beliefs and cultural mores accent conflicts between America and various Islamic aspirants to regional power.

Writing in *Foreign Affairs* in 1993, Samuel Huntington highlights this trend:

Conflicts between groups in different civilizations will be more frequent, more sustained and more violent than conflicts between groups in the same civilization; violent conflicts between groups in different civilizations are the most likely and most dangerous source of escalation that could lead to global wars; the paramount axis of world politics will be the relations between ‘the West and the Rest.’³⁵

Whereas political and economic theories provided the basis for ideological competition during the Cold War, social, religious, and cultural totems will fuel such competition in the evolving post-Cold War period.³⁶ U. S. efforts to cultivate, promote, and *protect* its global interests in the

³² Kugler, 163.

³³ Brzezinski, Scowcroft, and Murphy, 20-30.

³⁴ The “health” of ideology has proved a lively topic since the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989. Writing in *The National Interest*, Francis Fukuyama proclaimed “the end of history as such: that is, the end point of mankind’s ideological evolution and the universalization of Western liberal democracy as the final form of human government.” Francis Fukuyama, “The End of History?” *The National Interest*, no. 16 (Summer 1989): 3-18. For opposing views, see Paul M. Belbutowski, “Strategic Implications of Cultures in Conflict,” *Parameters* 26, no. 1 (Spring 1996): 32-42; and Huntington, “Erosion of Interests,” 28-49.

³⁵ Samuel P. Huntington, “The Clash of Civilizations?” *Foreign Affairs* 72, no. 3 (Summer 1993): 48.

³⁶ For an illuminating and wide-ranging discussion of the issue, see Daniel Patrick Moynihan, *Pandaemonium* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993).

face of this multi-dimensional, multi-disciplinary competition will prove both more complicated and more costly.

Ebbing Advantage. Related symbiotically to the expansion of competition around the world is a fourth feature of the emerging environment: the increasing lethality of modern armed conflict and the increasing vulnerability of U. S. forces. The phenomenon making perhaps the single greatest contribution to this increasing lethality is proliferation—proliferation of advanced weapons and information systems. Despite the acknowledged difficulty in assembling meaningful data on proliferation,³⁷ the nature of world military expenditure and global arms trade over the past quarter century provides rough evidence of this problem. Although military spending worldwide is in decline since 1987,³⁸ the decline follows a sustained period of growth by which many nations accumulated impressive arms stocks. Furthermore, changes in military spending occur asymmetrically among regions and nations, disrupting fragile balances of power. For example, in the volatile Middle East, Iran and Saudi Arabia increased their real military budgets 42.5 percent and 12.9 percent respectively between 1992 to 1995. Likewise in South Asia over the same period, India and Pakistan increased their defense spending in constant prices by 12 percent and 19.5 percent respectively.³⁹ Moreover, the changing regional distribution of international arms deliveries reflects increasing relative demand for modern weapons in the East Asia, Southeast Asia, and North Africa,⁴⁰ which portends relative gains in military potential for some in these regions.

³⁷ Keith Krause, *Arms and the State: Patterns of Military Production and Trade* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 216-219.

³⁸ Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, *SIPRI Yearbook 1995: Armaments, Disarmament and International Security* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 389-393.

³⁹ SIPRI, 389.

⁴⁰ International Institute for Strategic Studies, *The Military Balance 1996/97* (London: Oxford University Press, 1996), 277.

Widening diffusion of sophisticated—and not-so-sophisticated—weaponry is perhaps the greater problem.⁴¹ The collection of nations possessing nuclear weapons remains a relatively stable and select group: United States, Great Britain, France, Russia, and China—with Israel, India, Pakistan, South Africa, and perhaps North Korea on or across the threshold.⁴² But “chemical weapons can in principle be produced by almost any state that possesses an advanced chemical industrial plant.”⁴³ For example, the number of nations equipped with chemical weapons has increased from 6 at the onset of the Cold War to 16-25 at present.⁴⁴ Complementing the problem of chemical weapons proliferation, the number of nations seeking to produce biological weapons is believed to have increased from 4 in 1972 to 10 in 1989.⁴⁵ Highlighting the dangers associated with these trends in *Foreign Affairs* in 1997, Richard K. Betts observes:

The roles such weapons play in international conflict are changing. They no longer represent the technological frontier of warfare. Increasingly, they will be weapons of the weak—states or groups that militarily are at best second-class.⁴⁶

As reflected in Table 1, the diffusion throughout the world of advanced conventional weapons such as cruise and ballistic missiles, supersonic combat aircraft, and main battle tanks also remains a prickly issue. The trends actually reflect a gradual diminution of the technology

⁴¹ Krause, 187-192, 208-212.

⁴² SIPRI, 317-327.

⁴³ Krause, 192.

⁴⁴ Julian Perry Robinson, “Chemical Weapons Proliferation in the Middle East,” in *Non-Conventional Weapons Proliferation in the Middle East*, eds. Efraim Karsh, Martin S. Navias and Philip Sabin (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), 90-92; Edward M. Spiers, *Chemical and Biological Weapons: A Study of Proliferation* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1994), 6, 23-25; and Krause, 192.

⁴⁵ Spiers, 14.

⁴⁶ Richard K. Betts, “The New Threat of Mass Destruction,” *Foreign Affairs* 77, no. 1 (January/February 1998): 27.

advantages of developed countries with so-called “high-tech” militaries over developing countries with “low-tech” militaries.⁴⁷

Coupled with the problem of proliferation is the increased range and precision of modern weapons. Increases in maximum ranges for surface fires—potentially up to 60,000 meters for field artillery and 60 nautical miles for naval guns—continue unabated owing to advancements in weaponeering and

Table 1. Number of Developing Countries with Advanced Military Systems, 1950-1985

	<u>1950</u>	<u>1960</u>	<u>1970</u>	<u>1980</u>	<u>1985</u>
Supersonic aircraft	---	1	28	55	55
Missiles	---	6	25	68	71
Armored vehicles	1	38	72	99	107
Main battle tanks	---	32	39	---	62
Modern warships	4	26	56	79	81

Source: Krause, *Arms and the State*, 189-190.

ammunition.⁴⁸ Likewise, the world has seen major improvements in bombing precision. The circular error probable (CEP) for state-of-the-art, manned aircraft improved from 3,300 feet during World War II to 200 feet during the Persian Gulf War.⁴⁹ The number of aircraft and bombs required to destroy a given target has decreased dramatically, over a hundred-fold owing to the development of precision-guided munitions.⁵⁰ Evidence suggests, however, that the developmental limits of many advanced weapons systems are in sight.⁵¹ If so, the emerging situation—proliferation of extremely precise weapons that cannot be easily “trumped” by further technological advance—suggests that the maintenance of military advantage will grow

⁴⁷ David Mussington, *Understanding Contemporary International Arms Transfers*, Adelphi Paper 291 (London: Brassey’s, 1994), 4-5; Krause, 214.

⁴⁸ Terry J. Gander and Charles Q. Cutshaw, eds., *Jane’s Ammunition Handbook*, 6th ed. (Coulson, Surrey: Jane’s Information Group Limited, 1997), 7-8.

⁴⁹ CEP is the radial distance from a target inscribing an imaginary circular area large enough so that 50 percent of the bombs dropped fall within it. Richard P. Hallion, *Storm Over Iraq: Air Power and the Gulf War* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1992), 282-283.

⁵⁰ Barton Gellman, “Gulf War Workhorses Suffer in Analysis,” *Los Angeles Times*, 10 April 1992, Sec. A39; and Hallion, 282-283.

⁵¹ George and Meredith Friedman, *The Future of War: Power, Technology, and American World Dominance in the 21st Century* (New York: Crown Publishers, Inc., 1996), 113-298.

more costly, an effect magnified by a military service's need or desire to maintain a diverse set of capabilities. In any likely scenario, "keeping up with the Joneses" is a more costly endeavor.

Merger Mania? Finally, the passage of the *Goldwater-Nichols Department of Defense Reorganization Act of 1986* marked a significant alteration of the U. S. security environment. Among other changes to the Unified Command Plan, Goldwater-Nichols considerably expanded the powers of the combatant commanders, giving them budgetary authority and strengthening their operational authority.⁵² For the United States all warfare is joint warfare. With the implementation of Goldwater-Nichols and the expansion of joint culture under General Colin L. Powell, then Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, this central fact guides every response by U. S. military forces. It is also reflected in joint doctrine. *Joint Warfare of the Armed Forces of the United States* (Joint Pub 1), one of DOD's two capstone documents, declares that "Joint warfare is team warfare"⁵³ and further states that:

Campaigns of the Armed Forces of the United States are joint; they serve as the unifying focus for our conduct of warfare. Modern warfighting requires a common frame of reference within which operations on land and sea, undersea, and in the air and space are integrated and harmonized; that frame of reference is the joint campaign.⁵⁴

Within their respective areas of responsibility, combatant commanders conduct all military operations, usually by establishing a joint task force. *Doctrine for Joint Operations* (Joint Pub 3-0) affirms this view: "To achieve assigned objectives, joint forces conduct campaigns and major operations. Functional and Service components of the joint force conduct subordinate and

⁵² Goldwater-Nichols Department of Defense Reorganization Act of 1986, 10 U. S. Code § 161 (1989). See also Ronald H. Cole and others, *The History of the Unified Command Plan, 1946-1993* (Washington, DC: GPO, 1995), 98-108.

⁵³ Joint Pub 1, *Joint Warfare of the Armed Forces of the United States* (Washington, DC: Joint Chiefs of Staff, January 1995), i.

⁵⁴ Joint Pub 1, IV-1.

supporting operations, not independent campaigns.”⁵⁵ The centrality of the joint task force is further emphasized in *Concept for Future Joint Operations*⁵⁶ and *Joint Vision 2010*.⁵⁷

Thus, in the context created by Goldwater-Nichols, the joint task force is the quintessential all-purpose force. It focuses service strengths in mutual support, promoting the integration and exploitation of all available capabilities to accomplish the mission. At the same time, it permits greater specialization by each of the services, a less-popularized consequence of the 1986 act. In short, Goldwater-Nichols represents the merger of four separate enterprises; the Army, Air Force, Navy, and Marine Corps must now be viewed not as four competing services, but as four divisions (or “strategic business units”) of a unified firm.

Decreasing Clarity, Increasing Costs

While the above survey of the emerging strategic environment is not exhaustive, it illustrates the principal implications for the Marine Corps and the other services. These reflect the increased variety, volatility, and uncertainty in the external environment. Increased confusion and decreased clarity, which translate into reduced predictability in the environment, augment the difficulty and costs associated with tailoring forces to perform a multitude of diverse functions and missions. Expanded interests multiply the difficulties associated with maintaining adequate functional and regional expertise, while increased competition and increased lethality render efforts to maintain competitive advantage across an array of activities more costly. In the private sector, these circumstances inevitably result in increased *marginal costs* of diversification for a firm.

⁵⁵ Joint Pub 3-0, Doctrine for Joint Operations (Washington, DC: Joint Chiefs of Staff, February 1995), II-4.

⁵⁶ Joint Chiefs of Staff, Concept for Future Joint Operations (Washington, DC: Joint Chiefs of Staff, 1997), 60.

⁵⁷ Joint Chiefs of Staff, Joint Vision 2010 (Washington, DC: Joint Chiefs of Staff, 1996), 8-9, 34.

The same is likely true for the Marine Corps. Routine functions become more costly in terms of resources as the Marine Corps is obliged to arm and equip its units for a more varied, lethal environment. They are also more costly in terms of information as leadership is obliged to absorb and assimilate more complex sets of information in making plans, setting policy, and executing operations. Moreover, the more widely these functions are diversified, the more extensive is the external environment's fiscal impact on the Corps' strategic posture. Thus, the aforementioned developments in the global security environment appear consistent with increases in the *marginal costs* of diversification that the Marine Corps faces.

The effect of the emerging strategic environment on *marginal benefits* of diversification in the Marine Corps appears, at first glance, ambiguous. Nothing in this examination of the strategic environment points to an unequivocal reduction in the benefits of maintaining a highly diversified set of military capabilities. Indeed, one might argue that increased variety, volatility, and uncertainty in the operating environment demand an all-purpose force with an ever wider array of capabilities. Assertions that the Marine Corps should be that force are, however, arbitrary and often emotional, for the advent of joint warfare has given the nation a multitude of force deployment options.

Although its full impact may have been missed by some, Goldwater-Nichols heralded a crucial change in the Marine Corps' external environment, for it resulted in the ubiquitous joint task force that envelops all Marine forces, save the Marine Expeditionary Unit on routine deployment. Since the joint task force by definition derives its capabilities from the varied capabilities of the four services, a high degree of diversification is now obtained from this force; indeed, a strength of the joint task force is that it permits service components to specialize. Since no service will ever fight alone under the current paradigm, no single service need provide

all-purpose forces. Rather the joint task force will need to draw on multi-purpose forces from each of the services. In essence, Goldwater-Nichols gives the nation the ability to create and manage diversity via joint warfare, versus service warfare. Thus, one must ultimately consider that Goldwater-Nichols contributes to a decrease in the *marginal benefits* of diversification in the Marine Corps. In sum, the Marine Corps confronts much changed strategic and organizational environments in the 1990s which conspire to increase the cost and decrease the benefits of a highly diversified Marine Corps.

CHAPTER 3

UNRELATED DIVERSIFICATION

Unfortunately, as the firm diversifies, it becomes increasingly difficult for corporate executives to use strategic controls. Their spans of control increase and the volume of information they receive consequently is greater. When limits on their information-processing capabilities are reached as differences among divisions increase, executives increasingly rely on financial-outcome controls.

—Hoskisson and Hitt, *Downscoping*, 1994

Comforts of the Cold War

The Cold War represents a dichotomous period in U. S. history. On the one hand, it was for many Americans a period of grave anxiety resulting from contemplation of Armageddon, the mutual destruction of West and East in nuclear war. On the other hand, it was a period of great comfort for the American military because it ultimately generated a well-defined, well-understood strategic problem. As a result of the Soviet threat, the American military gained several unusual perquisites—the most noteworthy perhaps being ample intellectual capital, prodigious fiscal resources, and a singular strategic focus. Luxurious in their adaptation to the Cold War, the services enjoyed a strategic recess that largely lasted forty years.

After identifying the key features of the external environment in Chapter 2, an effective assessment of the Marine Corps' overall strategic position must examine the internal circumstances affecting its organization and activities. Such an assessment involves seeking answers to several key questions, including those concerning its strategic focus and organizational evolution.

Theoretical Considerations

As Chapter 1 indicated, optimal diversification is partly a function of a firm's internal characteristics. Overdiversification can result for a variety of reasons which fall in three principle classes: *mismanagement*, *miscalculation*, and *cost flux*. Mismanagement leading to overdiversification occurs primarily for what are described as "agency reasons," the natural divergence between shareholder and managerial objectives. In this case, management pursues its own interests in a firm's continual expansion and diversification, which reduces employment risk and increases pecuniary and nonpecuniary compensation for management. This often occurs to the detriment of shareholder interests in profit-maximization.⁵⁸ Overall, the empirical evidence amply supports this proposition.⁵⁹

Second, miscalculation leads to overdiversification when managers overestimate their ability to manage a diverse portfolio of business activities. Richard Roll, of the University of California, Los Angeles, termed this the *hubris hypothesis* in his explanation of why some firms divest significantly following a period of aggressive acquisition. This seems a plausible explanation for the widespread divestments of the 1980s that followed the private sector's aggressive diversification of the 1960s and 1970s.⁶⁰

Third, cost flux can result from a variety of internal circumstances. For example, as firms expand and diversify, the task of management becomes more complex.⁶¹ Consequently,

⁵⁸ Markides, *Diversification*, 18-22; and Mueller, 199-219.

⁵⁹ See, for example, Michael C. Jensen, "Agency Costs of Free Cash Flow, Corporate Finance, and Takeovers," *American Economic Review* 76, no. 2 (May 1986): 323-329; or Nancy Knox Napier and Mark Smith, "Product Diversification, Performance Criteria and Compensation at the Corporate Manager Level," *Strategic Management Journal* 8, no. 2 (March-April 1986): 195-201.

⁶⁰ Richard Roll, "The Hubris Hypothesis of Corporate Takeovers," *Journal of Business* 59, no. 2 (April 1986): 197-216.

⁶¹ Hoskisson and Hitt, *Downscoping*, 64-65.

corporate and division headquarters staffs often grow to handle the increasingly complicated management problem. And existing managers are often diverted “to recruit, train and assimilate new management”⁶² rather than manage fruitful business operations, thus increasing the marginal costs of diversification. Additionally, the resulting, complex hierarchy complicates both the vertical and horizontal flow of information with similar effect.⁶³

Each of these internal phenomena, alone or in combination, contributes to overdiversification in business. Might similar circumstances contribute to a similar situation in the Marine Corps?

Anatomy of the Marine “Corps-glomerate”

General Charles C. Krulak, Commandant of the Marine Corps, wrote in his report on “Quadrennial Defense Review Implementation” that “the Marine Corps was never a ‘Cold War,’ Soviet-oriented force.”⁶⁴ While the Marine Corps certainly avoided focusing exclusively on the Soviet Union, it nonetheless adapted substantially to this threat, especially in the final decade of the Cold War.

Insidious Myopia? Professional discourse, doctrinal evolution, and equipment procurement all provide evidence of an increased emphasis on sustained operations ashore and, specifically, mechanized operations in the waning years of the Cold War. For example, a survey of the past 30 years of articles published in the *Marine Corps Gazette* traces the rise of

⁶² Markides, *Diversification*, 25.

⁶³ See, for example, Edith T. Penrose, *The Theory of the Growth of the Firm* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1972); or Martin Slater, “The Managerial Limitations to the Growth of the Firm,” *Economic Journal* 90, no. 359 (September 1980): 520-528.

⁶⁴ Commandant of the Marine Corps message to All Marines (ALMAR 168/97), subject: “Quadrennial Defense Review Implementation,” 201330Z May 1997.

mechanized operations to a status co-equal with amphibious operations in the literature, as illustrated in Table 2. Additionally, 1987 marks the last year that the *Gazette* included a “Focus On” section specifically highlighting amphibious warfare.⁶⁵ Since, it has focused on armor issues three times, total quality leadership three times and intelligence eight times. And the 1988 introduction of a new category of articles, “Mechanized/Anti-Mechanized Operations,” in the year-end *Gazette* index provides still further anecdotal evidence of the “mechanization” of the collective Marine Corps mind.

The Marine Corps’ professional education programs reflect a similar

Table 2. Thirty Years of *Marine Corps Gazette* Article Topics

	<u>Armor/Mech/Anti-Mech Operations</u>	<u>Amphibious Operations</u>
1968-70 <u>1</u>	4	10
1971-73	0	14
1974-76	0	17
1977-79	0	20
1980-82	14	19
1983-85	16	9
1986-88 <u>2</u>	28	30
1989-91 <u>2</u> <u>3</u>	36	36
1992-94 <u>2</u>	17	38
1995-97 <u>2</u>	8	22

Notes:

- 1 Articles on armor during 1968-70 relate primarily to its employment in Vietnam.
- 2 From 1986, the jump in the frequency of amphibious articles results not from contributions advancing the discipline, but from authors criticizing and lamenting what they perceive as the Marine Corps’ declining amphibious capability.
- 3 The surge in articles during 1989-91 on mechanized operations coincides with the Persian Gulf War.

Source: Author’s survey of *Marine Corps Gazette* articles 1968-97.

evolution. For example, the share of the Command and Staff College curriculum devoted specifically to amphibious operations has declined from 18 percent in Academic Year 1976-77 to 5 percent in Academic Year 1996-97. At the same time, the share of the curriculum focused on sustained operations ashore has risen from 7 percent in Academic Year 1976-77 to 32 percent in

⁶⁵ The *Gazette* featured several articles on amphibious issues in its November 1992 issue, but did not highlight them in a “Focus On” section. Despite the fact that two subsequent special sections, “Focus on Moving from the Sea” (March 1995) and “Focus on Maritime Capabilities” (March 1996), treated some amphibious issues obliquely, the Corps’ own professional journal has not published an issue specifically focused on amphibious operations or warfare in a decade.

Academic Year 1996-97.⁶⁶ In both cases, most of the change occurred in the late 1980s.

Moreover, the curriculum's unambiguous emphasis on amphibious operations and issues ended by Academic Year 1990-91, displaced by a focus on "the MAGTF at the operational level of war...with primary focus at the Marine Expeditionary Force (MEF) level."⁶⁷

Subtle changes in armor/anti-armor doctrine also reflect the focal shift. In 1965 the doctrinal roles of tank units included supporting infantry, providing anti-tank protection, executing mechanized-motorized operations, and supplementing artillery.⁶⁸ They were identical in several re-publications of armor doctrine. But by 1981 the emphasis had shifted and the major roles of tank units were to provide anti-tank protection, execute mechanized operations and *serve as separate maneuver elements*.⁶⁹ This suggests an aspiration to refashion Marine armor doctrine along the lines of Army doctrine. Moreover, the 1981 manual relegated doctrine covering tanks in amphibious operations to the last two pages of Chapter 1, "Tank Employment"; whereas in 1965 this doctrine was the sole subject of Chapter 4, "Tanks in Amphibious Operations." In less than two decades, twenty-two pages has dwindled to two.

Leading procurement decisions also reflected additional emphasis on the Soviet threat. Programs supporting the modernization and rearmament of the division, for example, derived

⁶⁶ Author's survey of Command and Staff College Programs of Instruction and Syllabi of Instruction Academic Year 1976-77 through Academic Year 1996-97.

⁶⁷ U. S. Marine Corps, Command and Staff College, Syllabus of Instruction, AY 1990-91 (Quantico, VA: Marine Corps University, 1990), 1. Throughout the 1970s and 1980s the stated purpose of the curriculum was "to provide high level professional education with emphasis on Marine air-ground task forces in amphibious operations [italics added] for field grade officers of the Marine Corps, other services, and foreign countries." This emphasis disappeared by 1990.

⁶⁸ Fleet Marine Force Manual (FMFM) 9-1, Tank Employment (Washington, DC: Headquarters, U. S. Marine Corps, April 1965), 2.

⁶⁹ Fleet Marine Force Manual (FMFM) 9-1, Tank Employment/Countermechanized Operations (Washington, DC: Headquarters, U. S. Marine Corps, December 1981), 1-2.

largely from the perception that its firepower and mobility were insufficient to prevail against a Soviet-style mechanized threat. The purchase of the Dragon and TOW anti-tank missile systems was obviously designed to boost the division's ability to counter a mechanized force. Likewise, as Allan R. Millet points out in his acclaimed history *Semper Fidelis*:

In order to cope with Soviet-style mechanized forces, the Marine Corps began to replace its 105-mm howitzers with the M198 155-mm howitzer, which could fire at greater ranges with a variety of munitions designed either to employ terminal guidance systems or to blanket mechanized formations with small mines and multiple penetrating warheads.⁷⁰

Although fiscal and political considerations certainly played a role, adoption in 1985 of the Army's M-1A1 tank, which degraded the Marine Corps' expeditionary readiness, is further evidence of the willingness to compromise traditional capabilities in favor of enhanced land warfare capability.⁷¹ Moreover, requirements documents reveal that the Marine Corps procured the Light Armored Vehicle, at least in part, to provide increased mobile firepower in response to the Soviet threat.⁷²

Embracing the concept of sustained operations over wide areas, the Marine Corps also pursued significant mobility enhancements to compensate one of its chronic weaknesses in modern land warfare. Procurement of the High Mobility Multi-Purpose Wheeled Vehicle added significant mobility to the weapons, communications, and logistics systems of the MEF, while

⁷⁰ Allan R. Millet, *Semper Fidelis: The History of the United States Marine Corps*, rev. and expanded ed. (New York: The Free Press, 1991), 619.

⁷¹ Commanding General, Marine Corps Combat Development Command letter, 3900 WF 11GP, subject: "Draft Initial Statement of Requirement (ISOR) for an Expeditionary Tank," 20 June 1990; U. S. Marine Corps, Marine Corps Combat Development Command, Increase in Line Haul Capability for M1A1 Tank Assets Study, Study, November 1995, 44-45, 49; and U. S. Marine Corps, Marine Corps Combat Development Command, Armor/Anti-Armor Requirements Study, Study, May 1990, ES-2 and D-3 to D-5. The latter study noted that the M-1A1's "weight and size impose limitations and restrict its use by a rapidly responsive expeditionary force."

⁷² Commanding General, Marine Corps Development and Education Command letter to Director, Marine Corps Operational Test and Evaluation Activity, D 082/MAD:lab 3960, subject: "Light Armored Vehicle Test Package," 9 March 1981.

also adding substantially to its embarkation footprint.⁷³ Similarly, because its logistical ties to a sea base seemed too limiting in the extended battlespace that would form the venue for counter-Soviet employment, the Marine Corps added the 900-series five-ton truck and the Logistics Vehicle System (LVS) to its inventory.⁷⁴ Despite its tremendous capability, the LVS especially has proven problematic for Marine embarkation specialists, for it is relatively difficult to transport by both amphibious shipping and strategic air lift.⁷⁵

Loading for Bear. As the Marine Corps attended the Soviet threat during the Cold War, it also concurrently accomplished a multi-dimensional growth and expansion. The absolute size of the Marine Corps fluctuated regularly since 1945, usually in response to wartime mobilization and post-war demobilization; yet, the Marine Corps grew steadily in relation to its sister services (Figure 1 below). With an active duty end strength only one-eighth the size of the U. S. Army in 1950, it grew to field forces over one-third the size of the Army in 1996. Similarly, it more than doubled in size relative to the U. S. Navy and U. S. Air Force during the same period. Viewed another way, the Marine Corps share of all active duty defense forces increased from 5 to 12 percent between 1950 and 1996.⁷⁶

Examining the Marine Corps' *relative* expansion of its end strength, however, provides

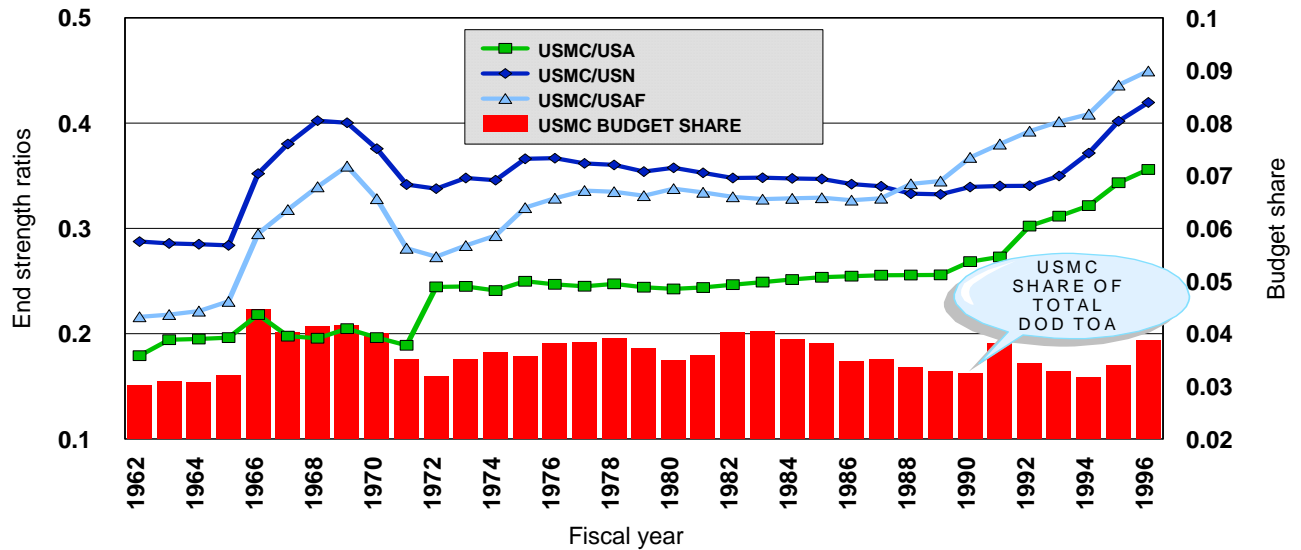
⁷³ The change in lift requirements per vehicle represented a 78 percent increase (59.245 square feet to 105.76 square feet), with respect to strategic sea lift, and 134 percent (3,642 pounds to 8,532 pounds), with respect to strategic air lift. Christopher F. Foss and Terry J. Gander, eds., *Jane's Military Vehicles and Logistics*, 18th ed. (Coulsdon, Surrey: Jane's Information Group Limited, 1997), 305-306, 456-457.

⁷⁴ Millet, 620.

⁷⁵ LtCol Leslie Stein, USMC, Executive Officer of 7th Motor Transport Battalion (1988-1989)/Commanding Officer of the Marine Corps Motor Transport School (1993-1995), interview by author, 2 April 1998.

⁷⁶ Department of Defense, Statistical Information and Analysis Division, "DOD Active Duty Military Personnel Strength Levels: Fiscal Years 1950-1996," downloaded from Internet site <http://web1.whs.osd.mil/mmmd/mmmdhome.htm>, 20 September 1997.

Figure 1. Marine Corps End Strengths Relative to Other Services, 1962-1996



Sources: Department of Defense, Statistical Information and Analysis Division, 1998; Department of Defense, National Defense Budget Estimates for FY 1998; Historical Tables, Budget of the U. S. Government, FY 1998

only a partial picture of the growing Marine “Corps-glomerate.” Since the Korean War, it has aggressively and successfully maintained its force structure despite periodic post-war restructuring of the Department of Defense (DOD). For example, during the latest post-Cold War draw-down, the Army absorbed force structure cuts reducing it from 18 active and 10 reserve divisions to the present 10 active and 8 reserve divisions (down 36 percent). Similarly, the Air Force endured a cut of 16 active and reserve fighter wings (down 44 percent). During this same period, the Marine Corps managed to maintain its legislated structure of three active divisions and three active wings, teamed with supporting forces and reserves.⁷⁷ In other words, the Marine Corps share of the nation’s ground force structure has expanded 50 percent since the end of World War II; its share of aviation force structure, 58 percent. Unfortunately, these changes generated no commensurate budget growth. From a business perspective, the Marine

⁷⁷ William S. Cohen, Annual Report to the President and the Congress, April 1997 (Washington, DC: GPO, 1997), 16, D-1 and D-2.

“Corps-glomerate” expanded and diversified through the Cold War without generating any significant additional “revenue” (Figure 1 above).

Although the aggregates confirm the steady *relative* growth of the Marine Corps, the ascendance of the MEF provides high-resolution evidence of the Marine Corps’ expansion and diversification. Serving as a focal point for Marine Corps activities and a microcosm of broader Marine Corps trends, the MEF emerged as the principle warfighting MAGTF and reservoir of forces in the late 1980s.⁷⁸ While the Marine Expeditionary Unit (MEU) constitutes the Marine Corps’ “crown jewel” in satisfying the nation’s forward presence and crisis response needs, the MEF has become its *de facto* “crown.”

Structural change is perhaps most informative of the MEF’s Cold War rise to primacy, for the increased emphasis on land warfare in the 1980s changed the face of the MEF considerably. Replicating the period’s professional discourse, the principal changes to force structure discussed and implemented in the 1980s reflect a preoccupation with the Soviet threat. For example, study of the mobile assault regiment, discussion of the combined arms regiment, creation of the light armored vehicle battalion, and redistribution of anti-tank units all derive from a concern for the survivability of the MEF in sustained operations ashore.⁷⁹ Recent conceptualization of the Marine Logistics Command derives from a heightened focus on sustainment of the MAGTF in major theater war,⁸⁰ for it has no apparent application in operations afloat. And proposals to establish a MEF Engineer Group to manage engineering operations in large-scale land warfare imply a focus on sustained operations ashore, with the

⁷⁸ Marine Corps Order (MCO) 3120.8A, Policy for the Organization of Fleet Marine Forces for Combat (Washington, DC: Headquarters, U. S. Marine Corps, 26 June 1992), 4.

⁷⁹ See, for example, U. S. Marine Corps, Marine Corps Mission and Force Structure Study (Haynes Board), Study, 29 March 1976, iv-v, viii-x, xvii.

MEF posited as the beneficiary of myriad heavy engineering organizations from all the sister services.⁸¹ Likewise, structure and manning of the command element itself evolved to incorporate the capability to conduct multi-divisional land warfare, perhaps as a joint forces land component commander, which today has no application in the realm of amphibious operations.

These structural changes, added to the tactical mobility and survivability enhancements summarized in the preceding section, directly and negatively impacted the MEF's strategic mobility. The improved MEF's strategic lift requirements increased steadily toward the end of the Cold War. Over the period 1965 to 1990 the MEF's assault echelon lift requirements for personnel grew from 34,500 to 37,770—an increase of 9.0 percent; for vehicles, from 716,000 to 870,000 square feet—an increase of 21.5 percent; and for cargo, from 1,180,000 to 1,793,000 cubic feet, before dropping back to 1,320,000 cubic feet—an increase of 51.9 percent before settling on a net increase of 11.9 percent.⁸² Since 1990, these requirements have changed only marginally: the numbers of troops in the MEF assault echelon has declined to 35,380; the lift requirement for vehicles has decreased slightly to 869,960 square feet; and the lift requirement

⁸⁰ Marine Corps Warfighting Publication (MCWP) 0-1.1, Componentry (Washington, DC: Headquarters, U. S. Marine Corps, draft), 27-28, 34; and Marine Corps Doctrinal Publication (MCDP) 3, Expeditionary Operations (Washington, DC: Headquarters, U. S. Marine Corps, draft), 78.

⁸¹ Commanding General, I Marine Expeditionary Force message to Commanding General, Marine Corps Combat Development Command, subject: "Fleet Operational Needs Statement (FONS)," 030715Z November 1997. The FONS justifies the need for a MEF Engineer Group primarily by assuming a MEF comprising "multiple divisions including U. S. Army and coalition divisions," with "a large number" of joint and combined engineer units under its operational control. It further offers as justification the fact that "the MEF CE is not presently manned and equipped to effectively command and control joint/combined engineer operations during major theater war (MTW) contingencies." The emerging force structure embodied in the proposal for a MEF Engineer Group thus arguably signifies a heightened focus on land warfare.

⁸² Center for Naval Analyses memorandum for author, CNA 98-0499, subject: "USMC Amphibious Lift Information," 7 April 1998. In an interesting example of miscalculation, the Haynes Board estimated that its 1976 recommendations to add mechanized mobile assault regiments and additional self-propelled artillery to the MEF would increase the MEF's lift requirement by about 11 percent. Although the Marine Corps ultimately implemented more modest force structure changes over the next 15 years, the MEF's lift requirement ironically ballooned by over 11 percent.

for cargo has increased slightly to 1,328,800 cubic feet.⁸³ These increases contributed significantly to the Navy's continuing difficulty in meeting the Marine Corps' requirements for amphibious lift, which have actually been adjusted downward to match the lift capacities that the Navy has opted to maintain.⁸⁴

Thus, the Marine Corps' response to the Cold War was not one of stoic disregard for its environment. By omission or commission, the MEF effectively exchanged its primary function in amphibious operations for an incidental function in sustained operations ashore. Catalyzed by the relatively generous defense budgets of the 1980s,⁸⁵ the MEF acquired the focus and trappings—and much of the heft—of the conventional land warfare that perhaps seemed the likely forum for employment of Marines forces.

Filling the Gap. If the Marine Corps' procurement patterns and structural changes in the 1980s disclose the beginning of a heightened commitment to land warfare, its discourse since 1952 also reflects an increasing fixation on the last of the Corps' Title 10 functions: to “perform such other duties as the President may direct.” Many view this as the principal and distinctive function of the Marine Corps.⁸⁶ This viewpoint derives, in part, from the impact of the Cold War on service roles. As the Cold War developed, the manifest Soviet threat in Europe became an

⁸³ John D. Goetke and William A. D. Wallace, *Project Culebra: Establishing the MEF (Afloat) in 2010*, CRM 95-85 (Alexandria, VA: Center for Naval Analyses, June 1995), 50.

⁸⁴ The decline in the number of MEFs that the Navy can lift simultaneously—from two in the 1960s to less than one today—is an evolutionary problem. As a matter of record, it is the result of two deleterious trends: the increased expense of amphibious ships, which means the nation buys fewer, and the growth of the assault echelon, which means the MEF consumes more amphibious lift. See Russell Murray II, “The Marine Corps' Future Lies in Being Useful,” *Marine Corps Gazette* 64, no. 8 (August 1980): 25-26; and “Amphibious Lift Status,” *Marine Corps Gazette* 79, no. 10 (October 1997): 5.

⁸⁵ Office of Management and Budget, *Historical Tables: Budget of the United States Government* (Washington, DC: GPO, 1997), 95-101.

⁸⁶ Millet, 445-652; General Charles C. Krulak, “Marines Ready, Always Have Been, Always Will Be,” *USA Today*, 11 March 1998, 11; General Charles C. Krulak, “A Force-in-Readiness,” *Marine Corps Gazette* 79, no. 9 (September 1995): 20-21; Kenneth W. Estes, *The Marine Officer's Guide*, 5th ed. (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 1985), 2, 51-54; U. S. Marine Corps, *Marine Corps Long-Range Plan (MLRP) 2000-2020* (Washington, DC:

all-consuming preoccupation of the Army and Air Force. They adapted and refined doctrine, training, structure, and equipment to blunt and roll back a Soviet mechanized thrust into Western Europe. As the Marine Corps further defined its own post-World War II role, it endeavored to fill the strategic and operational voids created by the Army and Air Force focus on the Fulda Gap. Thus was born the “expeditionary force-in-readiness”—a go-anywhere, do-anything, all-purpose force that provides a diverse set of capabilities in furtherance of national security objectives.

The developmental history of the MEU provides solid evidence of the broadening Marine Corps focus. Predecessor of today’s MEU, the Marine Amphibious Unit (MAU) claimed seven capabilities in the late 1970s, the majority of which were closely associated with amphibious operations.⁸⁷ The MAU added additional capabilities during the 1980s including counterinsurgency, terrorism counteraction, and peacekeeping, bringing the total to 17 by 1988. In the process, it diversified to provide limited capabilities in three new functional areas: civic actions, peace operations, and special operations.⁸⁸ Today, the MEU boasts 29 distinct capabilities, some only tenuously linked to amphibious operations.⁸⁹

In short, not only did the Marine Corps shift its focus from amphibious operations to sustained operations ashore during the Cold War, but it also broadened its focus to include a wide variety of smaller actions encompassing virtually anything the Army and Air Force eschewed.

Headquarters, U. S. Marine Corps, June 1991), 4-3; and U. S. Marine Corps, Concepts & Issues 96: First to Fight in the 21st Century (Washington, DC: Headquarters, U. S. Marine Corps, 1996), 9-12.

⁸⁷ Fleet Marine Force Manual (FMFM) 0-1, Marine Air-Ground Task Force Doctrine (Washington, DC: Headquarters, U. S. Marine Corps, August 1979), 5-2.

⁸⁸ Operational Handbook (OH) 2, The Marine Air-Ground Task Force (Washington, DC: Headquarters, U. S. Marine Corps, March 1987), 9-5; and Dennis R. Blankenship, “Marine Expeditionary Unit (Special Operations Capable),” *Amphibious Warfare Review* 6, no. 3 (Summer 1988): 44-47.

Filing Bankruptcy? Required by the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 1997, the Quadrennial Defense Review (QDR) constituted a clear effort to eliminate inefficiencies in DOD with the aim of generating funds for needed modernization from within the DOD budget.⁹⁰ The corollary conduct of two Force Structure Reviews in the Marine Corps during 1997 aimed to identify force structure cuts that would (1) facilitate QDR-mandated end strength reductions, (2) improve selected fleet manning levels to 90 percent, and (3) “*enable us to recapitalize the Marine Corps and allow us to invest in our future.*”⁹¹ While the reviews did little to accomplish the last objective, a Force Structure Planning Group will convene in 1999 with this as a principal goal. In effect, these Marine Corps reviews are the first stabs at restructuring to forestall “bankruptcy,” as was candidly admitted during the initial briefing of the results of the Active review during July 1997.⁹²

Unfortunately, the Corps’ financial problems are sufficiently grave to make them insoluble by merely tinkering on the margins of force structure. While research and development expenditures are relatively constant, averaging \$267 million over the current Future Years Defense Plan (FYDP), average total and per capita procurement will fall short of the thirty-year averages by 62 percent and 74 percent respectively.⁹³ In broad terms, the current

⁸⁹ Marine Corps Order (MCO) 3120.9A, Policy for Marine Expeditionary Unit (Special Operations Capable) (MEU (SOC)) (Washington, DC: Headquarters U. S. Marine Corps, 24 November 1997), 9-14.

⁹⁰ Cohen, Report of the Quadrennial Defense Review, iii-iv, vii.

⁹¹ CMC, ALMAR 168/97, 201330Z May 1997. See also “Strategic Reviews Identify Cuts, ‘Tail-to-Teeth’ Shifts,” Marine Corps Gazette 81, no. 11 (November 1997): 4.

⁹² BGen Keith T. Holcomb, USMC, “Results of the Active Force Structure Review Group,” briefing presented at the Marine Corps University, Marine Corps Combat Development Command, Quantico, VA, 31 July 1997.

⁹³ Unclassified fiscal data provided by Headquarters, U. S. Marine Corps, Programs and Resources Department as extracted from President’s Budget FY1998 (Washington, DC: Office of the Secretary of Defense, 1997), CD-ROM. These figures, as well as all subsequent figures in this section, are calculated in constant dollars based on fiscal year 1997.

FYDP calls for average annual investment⁹⁴ amounting to only 71 percent of the Marine Corps' thirty-year average. Overall, Marine budget documents reflect an anticipated shortfall in research, development, and procurement accounts of \$1.1 billion annually over the course of the current FYDP.⁹⁵ At present and expected future levels, the Marine Corps' fiscal resources are insufficient to sustain the current strategic concept and posture. Ultimately, the Marine Corps' financial situation alone appears to justify significant strategic restructuring, which should have force structure changes as a collateral, not primary, effect.

Diversity: Virtue into Vice?

The foregoing discussion of the Marine Corps' Cold War evolution, while certainly not all-inclusive, leads to several crucial observations regarding the service's internal characteristics and resources. Increased scale and increased diversification typically lead to *cost flux*, a common factor that reduces the optimal level of diversification. In the private sector, evidence shows that increased management and information costs accompany expansions in the scale of organizations and diversity of their activities. Trends in the allocation of Marine Corps finances suggest that this is the case.⁹⁶ If so, then the marginal costs of diversification rise, which would tend to reduce the optimal level of diversification and create or aggravate an overdiversified position.

Miscalculation may also explain the altered focus, increased scale, and strained resources that characterize the present-day Marine Corps. Perhaps convinced that bi-polarity represented the

⁹⁴ The term "investment," as used here, comprises procurement, research, development, test and evaluation expenditures.

⁹⁵ HQMC (P&R), unclassified extract of President's Budget FY1998; and Brian Shannon, "Krulak: Marine Corps Needs \$500 Million 'To Do the Job,'" *Defense Daily*, 13 March 1998, 6.

⁹⁶ HQMC (P&R), unclassified extract of President's Budget FY1998.

new normalcy, Marine Corps leaders in the 1970s and 1980s may have believed that the long-term situation demanded an altered focus, added capabilities, and increased heft designed for sustained operations ashore.⁹⁷ Moreover, perhaps conditioned by the magnitude and convinced of the rectitude of the Reagan era military build-up, they may have calculated that future defense resources would be sufficient to sustain added diversity in Marine Corps roles and missions. Circumstances have since shown this reasoning to be erroneous. The renaissance of the multipolar world reduces the likelihood of sustained military operations in general war and augments the opportunities for interventionism.⁹⁸ Similarly, the corollary drop in defense spending increases the difficulty in sustaining a highly diversified Marine Corps.⁹⁹ With the benefit of hindsight, these phenomena together imply miscalculation in the Marine Corps' long-term planning of the 1970s and 1980s.

It is unclear whether or not calculated *mismanagement*, a self-aggrandizing process whereby managers pursue diversification beyond the point *they know* is optimal, contributed to the relative growth and diversification observed in the Marine Corps over the recent decades. This research provides evidence of increased emphasis on the Marine Corps' secondary functions in a departure from taxpayer (in a sense, "shareholder") interests in the primary function as embodied in Title 10. Nothing indicates that self-interest inspired these decisions. It is possible that a bureaucratic interest in the institutional survival and growth of the Marine Corps contributed to the focal shifts described herein; but this is speculative at best.

⁹⁷ The threat assessments used to justify many of the force structure changes and procurement decisions of the 1970s and 1980s support this assertion.

⁹⁸ Bradley Graham, "Pentagon Assesses Future Demands on a Smaller Military Force," Washington Post, 2 April 1997, Sec. A6.

⁹⁹ Robert E. Hoskisson and Michael A. Hitt, "Antecedents and Performance Outcomes of Diversification: A Review and Critique of Theoretical Perspectives," Journal of Management 16, no. 2 (Summer 1990): 464-465, 499.

Most interesting and alarming in this analysis, however, is the fact that the trends discussed herein reflect a marginalization of the Marine Corps' traditional—and legislated—core “business”: amphibious warfare. Instead of nurturing and capitalizing on its core business, the Marine Corps spent the 1980s and 1990s emphasizing “acquired” cores associated with performing sustained land warfare and serving as the force-in-readiness. Major Robert Brennan alertly highlighted this shift in focus in his November 1994 *Proceedings* article questioning both the wisdom and feasibility of accepting the primacy of the MEF as warfighter in sustained operations ashore.¹⁰⁰

The displacement of amphibious warfare as the defining element of the Marine Corps ethos constitutes the Cold War's collateral damage to the Marine Corps. In short, the Marine Corps and the MEF evolved in response to the demands of the Cold War. Notwithstanding its frequently professed commitment to its amphibious heritage, the Marine Corps has come to emphasize sustained land operations and all-purpose readiness at the expense of amphibious operations. Writing in *Proceedings* in September 1997, Commander T. J. McKearney noted:

It could be argued that the Corps gradually has abandoned its traditional—and legislated—dedication to amphibious warfare. In its place is a less defined role: Marines can move infantry forces anywhere on short notice, but so can the Army; Marines have prepositioned main battle tanks..., but so has the Army; Marines can build and operate expeditionary airfields, but so can the Air Force.¹⁰¹

Traditionally viewed as complement to the Army in land operations, the Marine Corps has evolved into a competitor. The tenor of the debate between Army and Marine Corps adherents during the QDR supports this proposition. Moreover, the Marine Corps has pursued its perceived destiny as the all-purpose force to the point of distraction. Unfortunately, its internal characteristics—and especially its internal resources—make this strategy untenable.

¹⁰⁰ Robert Brennan, “The MEF as a Warfighter?” *Proceedings* 120, no. 11 (November 1994): 5.

¹⁰¹ T. J. McKearney, “The Dark Side of Expeditionary,” *Proceedings* 123, no. 9 (September 1997): 65-68.

CHAPTER 4

RIGHTEOUS RECIDIVISM

Much like overweight people...corporations are working off excess weight. They are shedding unwanted and often unlucrative divisions, subsidiaries, and product lines in order to concentrate on what they do best and most profitably. When they do buy another company now, it's done to enhance the "core" business.

—*U. S. News & World Report*, 15 April 1985

Such was and is the chief mission of the United States Marines: to study and perfect amphibious warfare so that, irrespective of technological changes, the amphibious assault is always feasible.

—Isely and Cowl, *The U. S. Marines and Amphibious War*, 1951

To borrow a lyric from the famous poet-rocker Bob Dylan: "The times they are a-changin'." The end of the Cold War, the implementation of Goldwater-Nichols, budget reductions in the Marine Corps—together these events press the Marine Corps to adapt to a new strategic environment. The U. S. Navy found itself in a similar predicament after the Korean War, and at the time Samuel P. Huntington emphasized the need to begin adaptation by updating the Navy's strategic concept:

Shifts in the international balance of power will inevitably bring about changes in the principle threats to the security of any given nation. These must be met by shifts in national policy and corresponding changes in service strategic concepts....If a service is to continue to exist, it must develop a new strategic concept related to some other security threat.¹⁰²

Huntington advocated a different methodology for updating the Navy's strategic concept in 1954 than is proposed in the present paper. Still, the essence of his message seems timeless. The Corps' current situation demands a dispassionate review of its own strategic concept.

¹⁰² Samuel P. Huntington, "National Policy and the Transoceanic Navy," *Proceedings* 80, no. 5 (May 1954): 484.

Assessing the Situation

Chapters 2 and 3 uncovered evidence that evolution of the Marine Corps' external environment and internal characteristics is increasing the costs and decreasing the benefits of diversity in Marine Corps activities and capabilities. The expected consequence of such changes is a reduction in the optimal level of diversification. This suggests that the Marine Corps' activities cannot now be optimally diversified, unless the Marine Corps was already *underdiversified*—an improbable situation. But what objective evidence confirms that the Marine Corps is in fact overdiversified in the post-Cold War period? What suggests that overdiversification is contributing to declining performance?

“Corporate” Diagnostics. Empirical evidence that a firm is overdiversified is, in fact, difficult to find. Easy formulas confirming overdiversification do not exist. Still, careful research has demonstrated that overdiversified firms possess a common set of characteristics discernable in advance.¹⁰³ Analysis of the activities of 219 firms from 1981 to 1985 by Constantinos C. Markides shows that “refocusing firms were characterized by high diversification and poor performance.”¹⁰⁴ Additionally, his research distinguished the following four specific characteristics¹⁰⁵ of diversified firms that correlate strongly with the need or decision to refocus:

- w Firms refocus in the midst of a “performance crisis,” which takes several forms in the private sector: declining absolute profitability, declining profitability relative to the

¹⁰³ Markides, *Diversification*, 67-80; Hoskisson and Hitt, *Downscoping*, 4-5, 73-82; and Irene M. Duhaime and John H. Grant, “Factors Influencing Divestment Decisionmaking: Evidence from a Field Study,” *Strategic Management Journal* 5, no. 4 (July-September 1984): 301-318.

¹⁰⁴ Markides, *Diversification*, 80.

¹⁰⁵ Markides, *Diversification*, 68, 75-80.

- past, declining profitability relative to the competition and/or declining market share.
- w Firms refocus on an attractive core business.
- w Firms refocus when the core business represents a “big portion” of the total business of the firm.
- w Firms refocus when they possess a substantial market share in the core business.

Moreover, Hoskisson and Hitt determined that declining research and development spending is a reliable predictor of declining strategic competitiveness and a looming “performance crisis.”¹⁰⁶

Thus, several characteristics can serve as analytical aids in identifying overdiversification.

“Corporate” Analysis. Confirming or predicting overdiversification is perhaps more difficult with respect to military organizations, in which redundancy, versatility and adaptability are often prized characteristics. Moreover, the Marine Corps is not a commercial entity; thus, Markides’ four characteristics are not automatically applicable to its strategic posture. For example, profitability, whether absolute or relative, has no bearing on Marine Corps activities. Measures such as return on sales, return on investment, and return on equity are equally irrelevant. Still, many of the characteristics Markides identified are meaningful in analyzing the Marine Corps, and together they help to appraise its diversified scope. First, the degree of diversification is relevant, for it affects the efficiency of Marine Corps activities. Like many American firms, the Marine Corps is a diversified entity. Just as a private sector firm markets many goods and services, the Marine Corps supports the national security strategy by providing many capabilities across the spectrum of crisis and conflict. As already discussed, a Marine Expeditionary Unit (MEU) alone claims not less than 29 distinct capabilities from peace operations and noncombatant evacuation operations to counterproliferation missions and

¹⁰⁶ Hoskisson and Hitt, Downscoping, 80-82.

amphibious assaults.¹⁰⁷ The Marine Expeditionary Forces (MEFs), together with Marine Security Forces, add a vast array of capabilities to the diverse Marine Corps palette.

Second, the Marine Corps is endowed with an attractive core “business.” The Marine Corps’ anecdotal, traditional, and legislated core business centers on amphibious operations. The genesis of the Marine Corps lies in a 10 November 1775 resolution of the Congress that authorized the formation of “two Battalions of Marines...able to serve to advantage by sea” and “useful in amphibious expeditions.”¹⁰⁸ At the outset, this characteristic distinguished the Corps from the Continental Army. In their seminal work *The U. S. Marines and Amphibious War*, Jeter A. Isley and Philip A Crowl emphasize the Marine Corps’ traditional focus:

Marines down to 1940 functioned either as landing troops for navy operations, as a small reinforcement for the army, or independently. During times of peace and war, marines served as boarding troops, gunners, and the nucleus for small landing parties on men-of-war.¹⁰⁹

The *National Security Act of 1947*, as amended, sanctioned this traditional view of the Marine Corps’ core business, describing its primary function as “the seizure or defense of advanced naval bases and...the conduct of such land operations as may be essential to the prosecution of a naval campaign,”¹¹⁰ activities that one might generally classify as amphibious operations. That primary function remains valid today as articulated in the controlling legislation: Section 5063 of Title 10, U. S. Code.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁷ MCO 3120.9A, 9-14.

¹⁰⁸ Edwin H. Simmons, *The United States Marines 1775-1975* (New York: The Viking Press, 1976), 1-2.

¹⁰⁹ Jeter A. Isley and Philip A Crowl, *The U. S. Marines and Amphibious War* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1951), 13.

¹¹⁰ National Security Act of 1947, 10 U. S. Code § 5013 (1966). Notwithstanding the subsequent phrase in the law enjoining the Marine Corps to “perform such other duties as the President may direct,” readiness is not the primary function of the Marine Corps as many assert. Being the “force-in-readiness” is an important but secondary legislated function as a careful, objective reading of the oft-ignored final sentence of the paragraph reveals: “However, these additional duties may not detract from or interfere with the operations for which the Marine Corps is primarily organized.”

¹¹¹ Armed Forces, 10 U. S. Code § 5063 (1995).

The evolving geostrategic situation augments the inherent value of this primary function. Expanding U. S. global interests, juxtaposed with increasing regional competition, logically demand deliberate enhancement of the nation's capability to influence events and project power around the world. Ironically, the United States is withdrawing diplomatically and militarily despite professed intentions to remain engaged, implicitly exchanging a strategic paradigm centered on visible forward presence for one based on aloof power projection. Foreign political developments and domestic fiscal pressures portend further physical disengagement.¹¹²

U. S. overseas presence in the form of fixed, overseas bases has declined steadily from 115 major bases in 1956 to 27 in 1995.¹¹³ Two phenomena characterize America's *de facto* diplomatic and military withdrawal. With the end of the Cold War, the gradual disappearance of America's "dependent states," coupled with overseas nationalism, generates inhospitality at best and animosity at worst in host countries, where the United States is increasingly viewed as an imperial presence. At the same time, the resurgence of American isolationism, typical of post-war periods in U. S. history, increasingly chastens America's internationalist leaders who hold that national security demands global leadership and aggressive engagement. This creates a domestic political climate unfriendly to the sustained, visible, and sizable peacetime commitment of military forces abroad. Furthermore, domestic economic exigencies compound the political difficulty associated with closing costly domestic bases, which are nevertheless lucrative for the host communities, while maintaining costly overseas bases.¹¹⁴ In short, complementary foreign

¹¹² James R. Blaker, *United States Overseas Basing: An Anatomy of the Dilemma* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1990), 125-131; Cameron W. Barr, "In Okinawa, 'Yankee, Go Home'?" *Christian Science Monitor*, 29 August 1996, 1+; Philip Finnegan, "Oman May Limit U. S. Presence," *Defense News*, 1-7 December 1997, 1+; "Deep Cuts at U. S. Base in Turkey," *Washington Post*, 28 March 1997, Sec. A30; and Bradley Graham, "New Weapons Give Navy Top Air Role This Time," *Washington Post*, 12 February 1998, Sec. A25+.

¹¹³ U. S. Navy, Office of Naval Intelligence, *Challenges to Naval Expeditionary Warfare* (Washington, DC: GPO, 1997), 7. See also Cohen, *Annual Report*, 122.

¹¹⁴ Cohen, *Annual Report*, 122-124.

and domestic demands for the retrenchment of overseas basing contribute to the decline in America's overseas presence and influence.

The issue of declining overseas basing, which translates into reduced theater access, is especially important in an analysis of the Marine Corps' diversified activities. Theory and evidence confirm that a diversified firm is more likely to refocus—and reap the benefits of refocusing—“the higher the attractiveness of its core business.”¹¹⁵ The emerging strategic environment is creating exactly this situation with regard to the Marine Corps.¹¹⁶ Emerging “anti-access challenges”¹¹⁷ coupled with America's *de facto* withdrawal from overseas enhance the value—or attractiveness—of the Marine Corps' traditional core business. In essence, the emerging strategic environment increases the premium on seaborne and sea-based forces, enhancing the value of this core business and making the conduct of sea-based expeditionary operations a future growth industry.

¹¹⁵ Markides, *Diversification*, 80.

¹¹⁶ Greg Weaver and J. David Glaes, *Inviting Disaster: How Weapons of Mass Destruction Undermine U. S. Strategy for Projecting Military Power* (McClean, VA: AMCODA Press, 1997), 53-56; and Gary H. Cheek, *Coping with Mass Destruction: United States Power Projection in the Nuclear and Chemical Third World*, SAMS Monograph (Fort Leavenworth, KS: U. S. Army Command and General Staff College, May 1993), 35-40.

¹¹⁷ Michael G. Vickers, “Warfare in 2020: A Primer,” unpublished research paper funded by the Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments, October 1996, 2-3, 5.

Third, the Marine Corps possesses “substantial market share” in this core business. It is, in law and fact, the nation’s principal repository of amphibious landing forces. Both the *National Security Act of 1947*, as amended, and “The Functions Paper” accord the Marine Corps “primary interest” in developing the “doctrines, tactics, techniques, and equipment employed by landing forces in amphibious operations.”¹¹⁸ While the Army can provide landing forces for amphibious operations—and has done so successfully in the past—it is preponderant in the “market” for sustained land operations. Only the Marine Corps possesses the unique combination of developmental tradition, legal basis, service doctrine, and specialized equipment necessary for real, opposed, over-the-shore operations, giving it a quasi-monopoly in the “market” for amphibious operations.

Fourth, despite the fact that the notion of profit is meaningless with respect to the armed forces, the Marine Corps’ performance is still relevant; and other measures of performance are available. The Marine Corps routinely uses readiness data, in its many forms, as a measure of performance. A recent study by the Center for Naval Analyses generally found that “the Corps’ readiness remains high by historical standards, although it is below its peak, and some of the indicators have fallen considerably.”¹¹⁹ For example, the percent of time that units spend in readiness status C1 or C2 for personnel has declined steadily since 1987, dropping almost 20 percent over ten years. The percent of time that units spend in C1 or C2 for equipment and supply has also declined, primarily during 1995 and 1996, to a point approximately two standard

¹¹⁸ National Security Act of 1947, 10 U. S. Code § 5013 (1966).

¹¹⁹ Matthew T. Robinson and others, *Measuring and Predicting Marine Corps Readiness: Final Report*, CRM 97-51.09 (Alexandria, VA: Center for Naval Analyses, April 1997), 3. The study relied on official readiness data as reported by Marine Corps units in the Status of Resources and Training Systems (SORTS) and the Marine Corps Automated Readiness Evaluation System (MARES).

deviations below the historical norms.¹²⁰ Only training readiness remains at or above historical norms,¹²¹ which is not surprising given the subjective nature of training readiness reports and the probable sanction of commanders who report low training readiness. In the aggregate, Marine Corps readiness appears to have peaked in the 1991-1992 time frame and then declined slightly but steadily to 1997.

A separate disturbing trend is the appearance of a sort of “class system” among Marine Corps units. The Marine Corps has long employed a rotational, or cyclical, readiness system to meet its commitments; however, evidence suggests that readiness troughs are growing deeper and longer for nondeployed units. While the overall readiness of deployed units has remained high, that of nondeployed units has declined steadily over the past 9 to 12 years depending on the type of unit. For example, evidence suggests that the percent of time that nondeployed units spend in C1 or C2 has declined by over 20 percent since its peak in 1987.¹²² One explanation for this is perhaps that the Marine Corps has begun systematically shifting scarce resources from nondeployed to deployed units to meet the continuing high demand for its myriad capabilities.

Finally, even if current Marine Corps performance is difficult to evaluate, figures on research, development, and procurement spending are readily available and are commonly considered relevant indicators of future capabilities and performance. Together, these categories of spending embody the investment that improves productivity, enhances capability, and sustains competitive advantage in the future. Accordingly, their evolution is significant, for it hints at the likely evolution of future performance.

¹²⁰ Robinson, 64-65, 88-91.

¹²¹ Robinson, 114-116.

¹²² Robinson, 3, 36-37.

Recent activity in the Marine Corps' investment accounts paints a grim picture. While research and development expenditures have proven relatively stable over the past decade (about 17 percent of total investment and 2 percent of total spending), procurement spending has dropped 72 percent from a post-Cold War high of \$1.3 billion in 1991 to \$366 million in 1998. This is only 28 percent of the thirty-year average and the lowest in over thirty years.¹²³ Viewed per capita, annual procurement spending has dropped from \$6,715 in 1991 to \$2,099 in 1998, only 33 percent of the thirty-year average.¹²⁴ Over the course of the current Future Years Defense Plan (FYDP), average annual procurement expenditures improve, projected to exceed by approximately 67 percent the annual average of the preceding five-year period; still, average total and per capita procurement over the FYDP will fall short of the thirty-year averages by 62 percent and 74 percent respectively.¹²⁵ Overall, the current FYDP calls for average annual investment amounting to only 71 percent of the Marine Corps' thirty-year average.

The foregoing analysis, together with observations contained in Chapters 2 and 3, suggests that the Marine Corps of the 1990s possesses a set of characteristics that is largely consistent with the phenomenon of overdiversification. It is highly diversified, pursuing a number of activities unrelated to an attractive core business in which it nevertheless remains preponderant. In addition, its investments are likely insufficient to sustain competitive advantage—a situation that signals a future performance crisis.

Deja Vu. The idea that the Marine Corps, as well as the other services, possesses an inefficient surplus of capabilities (is overdiversified) is not new. Without singling out the

¹²³ HQMC (P&R), unclassified extract of President's Budget FY1998. These figures, as well as all subsequent figures in this section, are calculated in constant dollars based on fiscal year 1997.

¹²⁴ HQMC (P&R), unclassified extract of President's Budget FY1998.

¹²⁵ HQMC (P&R), unclassified extract of President's Budget FY1998.

Marine Corps, the Commission of Roles and Missions of the Armed Forces (CORM) in 1995 urged all the military departments to sharpen their foci. The CORM reported:

We recommend reemphasizing traditional Service functions, sharpening the boundaries in some areas where unneeded overlap occurs, and relieving them of responsibilities that detract from their core competencies....Core competencies are the set of specific capabilities or activities fundamental to the Service or agency role. They define the Service's or agency's essential contributions to the overall effectiveness of DoD and its unified commands.¹²⁶

Although its use of the term *core competency* is imprecise, the Commission listed “amphibious operations, over-the-beach forced entry, and maritime pre-positioning” as the core competencies of the Marine Corps.¹²⁷ That of armored land warfare was conspicuously absent, assigned instead to the Army. The Commission's findings thus implicitly acknowledge the need for strategic restructuring to remedy the Marine Corps' performance-sapping overdiversification.

Downscoping with Distinctive Competencies, Not Core Competencies

One form of strategic restructuring used in the private sector is refocusing, or “downscoping.” Downscoping refers to the strategy of reducing the diversified scope of business activities and enhancing strategic control concentrated on core businesses or activities. The process begins by identifying those few commercial activities that form the firm's core. The determination of what constitutes a firm's core activities is a fundamental strategic decision extensively debated in the strategic literature.¹²⁸ A common and extensively discussed technique of strategic planning is deriving core activities from *core competencies* (usually defined as fundamental tangible or intangible assets, activities, or systems that enable the firm to produce

¹²⁶ CORM, 2-20.

¹²⁷ CORM, 2-20.

¹²⁸ See, for example, Kenneth A. Andrews, *The Concept of Corporate Strategy* (Homewood, IL: Dow Jones-Irwin, 1971); Michael E. Porter, *Competitive Strategy: Techniques for Analyzing Industries and Competitors* (New York: Free Press, 1980); and Peter F. Drucker, “The Theory of Business,” *Harvard Business Review* 72, no. 5 (September-October 1994): 95-104.

its end products efficiently).¹²⁹ A further improvement of this useful idea is the recent development of a strategic approach that employs a *resource-based view of the firm*, which according to David J. Collis and Cynthia A. Montgomery “combines the *internal* analysis of phenomena within companies...with the *external* analysis of the industry and competitive environment.”¹³⁰ The resource-based view of the firm holds that a firm will be ideally positioned to succeed if its corporate strategy—that is, “what the firm does” and “how it does it”—is tailored to optimally employ its key resources.¹³¹

¹²⁹ Drucker, “Theory of Business,” 99-101; C. K. Prahalad and Gary Hamel, “The Core Competence of the Corporation,” *Harvard Business Review* 68, no. 3 (May/June 1990): 79-91; Amy V. Snyder and H. William Ebeling, Jr., “Targeting a Company’s Real Core Competencies,” *Journal of Business Strategy* 13, no. 6 (November/December 1992): 26-32; and Rita Gunther McGrath, Ian C. MacMillan, and S. Venkataraman, “Defining and Developing Competence: A Strategic Process Paradigm,” *Strategic Management Journal* 16, no. 4 (May 1995): 251-275.

¹³⁰ David J. Collis and Cynthia A. Montgomery, “Competing on Resources: Strategy in the 1990s,” *Harvard Business Review* 73, no. 4 (July/August 1995): 119. To trace development of this idea, see Birger Wernerfelt, “A Resource-Based View of the Firm,” *Strategic Management Journal* 5, no. 2 (April-June 1984): 171-180; Kathleen R. Connor, “A Historical Comparison of Resource-Based Theory and Five Schools of Thought Within Industrial Organization Economics: Do We Have a New Theory of the Firm,” *Journal of Management* 17, no. 1 (March 1991): 121-154; and Margaret A. Peteraf, “The Cornerstones of Competitive Advantage: A Resource-Based View,” *Strategic Management Journal* 14, no. 3 (March 1993): 179-191.

¹³¹ In the literature, key resources are sometimes alternately referred to as core competencies, although this viewpoint is somewhat limiting. A firm’s key resources may include tangible assets, such as the local telephone company’s wiring to individual houses; intangible assets, such as a clothier’s lucrative brand name; and organizational skills, such as an overnight delivery company’s hub-and-spoke transportation process. The notion of core competency aligns most closely with the latter resource. See Collis and Montgomery, 119-120; Snyder and Ebeling, 26, 29-32.

This approach includes a ruthless analysis of a firm's resources, aimed at identifying those key ones that are valuable, inimitable, durable, and not easily substitutable.¹³² Applied rigorously, it yields a short list of key resources that provide for competitive superiority. This process addresses the established notion of core competency, but develops it more completely. According to the resource-based view, the identification of core competencies should not merely reflect an internal assessment of which of its activities a firm does best; rather, it should derive from an honest assessment of what it does better than its competitors. Thus, the term *distinctive competence* is more precise and illuminating.¹³³

Successful firms therefore design and, when necessary, refocus their strategies to capitalize on distinctive competencies. Ultimately, what a firm does—its core activities—ought to derive directly from these competencies. Writing in the *Harvard Business Review*, Collis and Montgomery note:

Good corporate strategy, then, requires continual reassessment of the company's scope. The question strategists must ask is: How far can the company's valuable resources be extended across markets? The answer will vary widely because resources differ greatly in their specificity....Specialized resources often play a critical role in securing competitive advantage, but, because they are so specific, they lose value quickly when they are moved away from their original settings.¹³⁴

Superior performance thus results when a firm identifies, cultivates, and exploits a competitively unique, relatively limited set of competencies in a well-integrated strategy.

¹³² Collis and Montgomery, 120-123. See also Jay Barney, "Firm Resources and Sustained Competitive Advantage," *Journal of Management* 17, no. 1 (March 1991): 99-120; and Constantinos C. Markides and Peter J. Williamson, "Related Diversification, Core Competencies and Corporate Performance," *Strategic Management Journal* 15 (Summer 1994): 151-153.

¹³³ Collis and Montgomery, 123-124. See also Michael A. Hitt and R. Duane Ireland, "Corporate Distinctive Competence, Strategy, Industry and Performance," *Strategic Management Journal* 6, no. 3 (July-September 1985): 274, 288-289.

¹³⁴ Collis and Montgomery, 127.

Downscoping the Marine “Corps-glomerate”

Downscoping, which proved an effective response to the overdiversification of many American firms in the 1980s, might serve as an effective tool to enable the Marine Corps’ strategic adaptation in the post-Cold War 1990s. While the Marine Corps clearly does not operate like a firm in the private sector, both face common demands for strategic planning; and application of strategic refocusing techniques evolved in the private sector to the Marine Corps strategic planning problem proves illuminating.

Revalidating Corps “Business.” The first step in downscoping consists in assessing and validating the core business of the Marine Corps. In the private sector, this can be a relatively heart-wrenching task, for it is subject to the analysis, judgement, intuition, objectives, desires, and even prejudices of the management team. In the public sector, the process is much simpler and straightforward since the law dictates the roles and functions¹³⁵ of a given agency or service. For the Marine Corps, then, Title 10 defines the core business. It does so by laying out the Corps’ functions as follows:

The Marine Corps shall be organized, trained, and equipped to provide fleet marine forces of combined arms, together with supporting air components, for service with the fleet in the seizure and defense of advanced naval bases and for the conduct of such land operations as may be essential to the prosecution of a naval campaign. In addition, the Marine Corps shall provide detachments and organizations for service on armed vessels of the Navy, shall provide security detachments for the protection of naval property at naval stations and bases, and shall perform such other duties as the President may direct. However, these additional duties shall not detract from or interfere with the operations for which the Marine Corps is primarily organized.¹³⁶

¹³⁵ For concise definitions of roles and functions as used here, see Joint Pub 0-2, Unified Action Armed Forces (UNAAF) (Washington, DC: Joint Chiefs of Staff, February 1995), I-6.

¹³⁶ Armed Forces, 10 U. S. Code § 5063 (1995).

As clearly articulated in Title 10, the primary core business of the Marine Corps encompasses base seizure, base defense, and land operations essential to naval campaigns. These activities commonly fall within the general rubric of amphibious operations. Additional legislated functions include—on a not-to-interfere basis—security aboard ship and security ashore, which together form a secondary core business in what might be termed physical security, or security operations.

The final function listed—to perform “other duties” at the President’s behest—is somewhat troubling because of its ambiguity. It contributes little that concretely supports a coherent strategic concept. Further, it seems to open a Pandora’s box of possibilities with regard to what may be considered proper Marine Corps missions and capabilities; it may be responsible in part for the Corps’ overdiversification, for it arguably justifies maintenance of every conceivable capability. Indeed, it has evolved to become a leading function on which the Corps’ leaders and observers frequently place primary emphasis.¹³⁷

Certainly, the unpredictability of the strategic environment accents the importance of readiness. The Marine Corps must always be prepared to respond in behalf of the nation *whenever* and *wherever* needed. But nothing in Title 10 suggests that it must focus on satisfying *whatever* need, for this viewpoint in fact dilutes the Corps’ strategic focus and strategic concept.

¹³⁷ Although the “force-in-readiness” idea is rooted in the congressional debates of 1952, its significant impact on strategic decisions is relatively recent. Amphibious operations were clearly still perceived as the Marine Corps’ *raison d’être* into the early 1980s. In official documents, this emphasis diminishes perceptibly beginning in the middle to late 1980s, displaced by the “force-in-readiness” function. U. S. Marine Corps, Marine Corps 1981 Concepts and Issues (Washington, DC: Headquarters, U. S. Marine Corps, 1981), I-2, I-13 to I-19; U. S. Marine Corps, Concepts and Issues 1989 (Washington, DC: Headquarters, U. S. Marine Corps, 1989), 1-1, 1-5; U. S. Marine Corps, Concepts & Issues 94: Taking the Corps into the 21st Century (Washington, DC: Headquarters, U. S. Marine Corps, 1994), 1-1, 2-2 to 2-5; U. S. Marine Corps, Making Marines & Winning Battles...Since 1775 (Washington, DC: Headquarters, U. S. Marine Corps, 1997), 1-2; U. S. Marine Corps, Concepts & Issues 1996, 9-12, 18-19; and U. S. Marine Corps, MLRP, 4-3. See also Millet, 445-652; and Estes, 2, 51-54.

Under Goldwater-Nichols this is an implicit function of the joint task force. Notwithstanding the imperatives of the environment and the strength of the arguments favoring the primacy of the “force-in-readiness” function, the law clearly states that the core business of the Marine Corps lies in serving as the main battery of the fleet. Providing security and maintaining a “force-in-readiness” are, by law, secondary functions.¹³⁸

Assessing Corps Competencies. Next, it is necessary to identify the distinctive competencies that support the Marine Corps’ legislated functions. Collis and Montgomery argue that this demands “a harsh external assessment of what it does better than competitors.”¹³⁹ The second step in downscoping then is to find the competencies in which Marine Corps holds a competitive advantage over its sister services and potential adversaries.

The issue of competencies has received extensive attention in the military literature. Military strategists, professionals, and observers have collectively associated at least 20 competencies, both specified and implied, with the Marine Corps.¹⁴⁰ *Send in the Marines*, a pamphlet published recently by Headquarters, U. S. Marine Corps, contains perhaps the best articulation yet of Marine Corps competencies. It highlights six core competencies, including *expeditionary readiness, expeditionary operations, sea-based operations, combined arms, reserve integration* and *forcible entry—from the sea*.¹⁴¹ Capturing the ideas most frequently expressed in the literature, it serves as a good starting point; however, even this document muddles somewhat the distinction between competencies, functions, and capabilities.

¹³⁸ In fact, the idea of the Marine Corps as a “force-in-readiness” actually derives from a 1952 conference committee report and, thus, lacks the force of law.

¹³⁹ Collis and Montgomery, 123.

¹⁴⁰ See, for example, Eliot A. Cohen, “Airpower, the Next War, and the Marine Corps,” *Marine Corps Gazette* 79, no. 11 (November 1995): 44; H. T. Hayden and G. I. Wilson, “Defining the Corps’ ‘Strategic Concept,’ ” *Marine Corps Gazette* 76, no. 5 (May 1992): 46; U. S. Marine Corps, *Send in the Marines: The Art of MAGTF Operations* (Washington, DC: Headquarters, U. S. Marine Corps, 1997), 9; U. S. Marine Corps, *Concepts & Issues* 1996, 9-12, 18-19; U. S. Marine Corps, *MLRP*, 4-3; and *CORM*, 2-20.

Certain of the competencies listed in *Send in the Marines* correspond more closely to functions or capabilities. *Sea-based operations* and *expeditionary operations* describe broad service functions that provide for specific service capabilities. For example, the term “sea-based operations” represents a complex endeavor, a function (or core “business”) that supports several capabilities including amphibious demonstrations, amphibious raids, amphibious assaults, and amphibious withdrawals (or end “products”). Likewise, the term “expeditionary operations” refers to a broad category of operations having a unique set of characteristics, a category of which amphibious operations is a subset. While *expeditionary operations* are doubtless a specialty of the Marine Corps, they resemble more a service function than a core competency, which is defined as a fundamental tangible or intangible asset, activity, or system that enables the service to perform its end missions and functions. *Forcible entry—from the sea*, which is really a type of amphibious operation, describes a specific capability that Marine Corps provides in support of national security.

Eliminating these, one is left with *expeditionary readiness*, *combined arms* and *reserve integration* as the Marine Corps’ competencies. *Combined arms* and *expeditionary readiness* resemble aggregate resources that probably cannot be reduced to more fundamental competencies, for they represent what Collis and Montgomery describe as valuable “combinations of skills, none of which is superior by itself.”¹⁴² The Marine Corps competence in combined arms, for example, represents the unique combination of skills in an integrated Marine Air-Ground Task Force (MAGTF). On average, the Marine is probably not the best infantryman in the world; that accolade is perhaps best be applied to the U. S. Army Ranger.

¹⁴¹ U. S. Marine Corps, *Send in the Marines*, 9.

Likewise, Marine field artillery and Marine aviation are probably not the world's best (although, given its passionate dedication to that task, Marine aviation probably does provide the best close air support). And certainly the Army boasts more robust combat service support capabilities. Still, the manner in which the Marine Corps employs *combined arms* in the MAGTF produces an unparalleled capability to operate in virtually any environment. This capacity, like that associated with *expeditionary readiness*, represents one of the Corps' distinctive competencies.

Reserve integration—also known as total force integration—is a third Marine Corps distinctive competency. It is difficult to conceive of any way to disaggregate further this simple but powerful process, which involves making highly competent active-duty Marines, recruiting them into the reserve component upon discharge from active service, training them rigorously under the guidance of active duty Marines (Inspector-Instructors), and integrating them with active component units as frequently as possible. The result is an ability to leverage the Reserve component and markedly increase the combat power provided by a service that comprises less than 12 percent of the nation's armed forces.

Divesting Unrelated "Products." The final step in assessing the Marine Corps' strategic posture involves a careful examination of its many functions and capabilities to identify those that cannot claim a clear path back through core functions to distinctive competencies. These become candidates for elimination under a downscoping strategy. This is analogous to the firm identifying those products that are unrelated to the employment of distinctive competencies in its core businesses.

¹⁴² Collis and Montgomery tend to use the terms "competencies" and "resources" interchangeably, although they seem to prefer "resources," which better encompasses a firm's tangible assets, intangible assets, and organizational skills. See Collis and Montgomery, 119-120, 124.

The Marine Corps maintains several capabilities that appear unrelated to its core functions, but this analysis will be limited to the most noteworthy examples. First, the capability to build a joint task force (JTF) headquarters out of a standing nucleus is not discernably connected to either of the Marine Corps' principle functions, amphibious operations and security operations. Nor does it appear to capitalize on any of the Corps' distinctive competencies, except perhaps expeditionary readiness. Overall, the logic of the Standing Joint Task Force (S-JTF) is, at best, tenuously linked to any of the Marine Corps' legitimate specialties. While establishment of a standing JTF headquarters probably merits consideration, it is an endeavor better undertaken by one of the unified commands. Thus, the Marine Corps' S-JTF seems a likely candidate for "divestment."

Second, the capabilities provided by the Chemical/Biological Incident Response Force (C/BIRF) are similarly unrelated to either principle function. While C/BIRF may constitute a significant public relations coup, it consumes scarce personnel, equipment and training resources that Fleet Marine Force units need to prepare for amphibious and security operations, their primary functions. Furthermore, it does not capitalize on competencies in which the Corps holds a competitive advantage. In fact, the U. S. Army is better suited to duplicate C/BIRF's capabilities owing to its distinctive competencies in nuclear/biological/chemical decontamination and civil affairs, as well as its possession of specialized equipment in substantial quantities. At best, C/BIRF is a distraction; at worst, it is detrimental to the maintenance of capabilities associated with the Marine Corps' legislated functions. The Marine Corps ought to "spin off" C/BIRF to the Army.

Finally, one must view the Marine Corps' emphasis on sustained operations ashore with circumspection. As this paper has already suggested, sustained operations ashore represent an

acquired function for which the Marine Corps certainly has some talent. Its distinctive competency in combined arms is particularly useful in such operations, in which the close integration of multidimensional maneuver, ground fires, and aviation fires is essential. Additionally, its expeditionary readiness makes Marine Corps units especially valuable early in such operations. But the Marine Corps lacks several competencies essential to success in sustained land operations including tactical mobility, tactical intelligence, heavy logistics, and organic, all-weather, day-night fire support. It would be naive to suggest that the Marine Corps should not participate in sustained operations ashore. However, the evidence contained in Chapter 3 suggests the Marine Corps has embraced sustained operations ashore to the detriment of amphibious operations, which is unsound from a strategic planning perspective and questionable concerning its Title 10 responsibilities. Downscoping demands that the Marine Corps cultivate distinctive competencies and field capabilities related to its core functions, amphibious and security operations, and then use them incidentally in sustained operations ashore as the strategic situation demands.

This list of candidates for divestment is not exhaustive. Nonetheless, it aims to emphasize the need for reasoned, deliberate analysis of the Corps' functions and capabilities following a methodology such as the resource-based view provides. The chief lesson is that sound strategic planning demands the existence and articulation of clear pathways from distinctive competencies through core functions to final capabilities.

Form After Function: Whither the Amphibious MAGTF?

To maximize the benefits of any refocusing strategy, it is not enough simply to address competencies and activities. The organization must also adapt to capitalize on the strategy.

Markides writes:

The organizational structure of a firm must be designed in such a way as to facilitate the firm's chosen strategy. This idea is neither new nor novel. It was Chandler (1962) who first pointed out that structure must follow strategy to facilitate realization of the strategy's objectives....Refocusing is a necessary but not sufficient condition for improved performance: Firms must also adjust their organizational structure to accommodate the new strategy if benefits of refocusing are to be fully realized.¹⁴³

Thus, the corollary of downscoping the Marine Corps is reconsideration of its organizational structure. If the core functions and distinctive competencies of the Marine Corps are in fact as have been described, then a strategy of downscoping must also consider force structure changes that will yield a force centered on a MAGTF optimized for amphibious operations across the spectrum of conflict.

The Deft, But Diminutive MEU. The MEU is unquestionably the Marine Corps' premier amphibious force today. More than any of the current MAGTFs (MEF, MEF (Forward) and Special Purpose MAGTF), it is immersed in an amphibious culture and it exemplifies the naval character of the Marine Corps. The MEU founds many of its capabilities (its end "products") on its service's primary function (its core "business"). Enduring rigorous pre-deployment testing and certification, it maintains high standards of excellence for sea-based operations. It is highly prized by theater commanders-in-chief, who recognize the value of an amphibious task force for peacetime engagement and crisis response missions, as well as an operational reserve or quick reaction force. It is versatile, flexible, and economical—all characteristics vital to amphibious operations. Finally, it capitalizes on the Marine Corps' distinctive competencies, such as *combined arms* and *expeditionary readiness*, to build its capabilities out of the amphibious function.

Unfortunately, while the MEU boasts robust capabilities for its size, it is constrained by limited manpower, mobility, fire power, and sustainment. It typifies what Title 10 envisions

¹⁴³ Markides, *Diversification*, 135, 165.

with respect to “fleet marine forces of combined arms,” but unless significantly reinforced it lacks the resources and endurance needed for the “conduct of such land operations as may be essential to the prosecution of a naval campaign.” Thus, the MEU is too limited to serve as the central building block in a strategy of downscoping; rather it best serves as a subordinate MAGTF tailored to accomplish limited but critical amphibious missions.

The Misunderstood MEF (Forward). Although the MEF (Forward) is not a standing organization within the Marine Corps, it merits consideration in a discussion of how to restructure to facilitate downscoping. Might the MEF (Forward) serve as the MAGTF optimized for amphibious operations that exceed a MEU’s capabilities? Specifically tailored to each mission, the MEF (Forward) could doubtless conduct amphibious operations across the spectrum of conflict. It is certainly versatile, flexible, economical. Yet, as a temporary organization it is unsuited to master what conventional military wisdom declares is the most complex and demanding military operation that exists.¹⁴⁴ Additionally, few outside the Marine Corps understand the MEF (Forward) concept. And practically speaking, it is impossible to program amphibious shipping for a MAGTF that has no standard organization. Ideally, to implement a strategy of refocusing on the amphibious function, the Marine Corps needs a standing MAGTF optimized in size and structure for sea-based operations across the spectrum of conflict and

¹⁴⁴ See, for example, General Dwight D. Eisenhower, report on the defense of the Philippines, 1939, quoted in Theodore L. Gatchel, *At the Water’s Edge: Defending against the Modern Amphibious Assault*, (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 1996), 1; and B. H. Liddell Hart, *The Defence of Britain*, (London: Faber & Faber Ltd., 1939), 130.

dedicated in fact and spirit to amphibious warfare. An honest appraisal reveals that the MEF (Forward) does not adequately satisfy this need.

The Unwieldy, Occasional MEF. While the MEF has enjoyed great success in sustained operations ashore, it is simply too big to satisfy the need for a cohesive, standing MAGTF dedicated to amphibious operations. The evidence assembled in Chapter 3 shows how the MEF has outgrown the Marine Corps' primary function, opting instead to focus on sustained operations ashore, an acquired function that places the Corps in disadvantaged competition with the Army. A brief digression emphasizes this point.

The Persian Gulf War was a noteworthy event in the history of the Marine Corps, for it signified the ascension of the MEF to primacy and demonstrated how closely the Marine Corps has evolved to resemble the U. S. Army. The MEF's main efforts and *modus operandi* during the war largely duplicated the Army's. The MEF deployed primarily via commercial air lift and sea lift through fixed air and sea ports of debarkation to large staging and assembly areas in a comparatively benign environment, as did the Army's VII Corps and XVIII Airborne Corps. While amphibious landing forces were relegated to the periphery, the MEF mounted a multi-divisional attack with shore-based forces, as did the Army's corps. And the MEF sustained its attack via extended lines of communication ashore from a large, fixed base of operations hundreds of miles to the rear of its forward line of troops, as did the Army's corps.

Clearly, the MEF's operations were a resounding success during the Persian Gulf War.¹⁴⁵ In the post-war analysis, however, many questioned the MEF's purpose in refocusing on land warfare and seeking an expanded portfolio of competencies. Others rightly questioned its

¹⁴⁵ Gen H. Norman Schwarzkopf, USA, USCENTCOM News Briefing, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, Wednesday, 27 February 1991.

proficiency.¹⁴⁶ The MEF suffers from substantial deficiencies in operational intelligence, ground mobility, all-weather fires, and operational sustainment in the context of sustained operations ashore against a well-organized, well-equipped, and determined enemy. The MEF can compensate for these deficiencies by attaching additional capabilities such as armor, artillery, and motor transport, usually from the Army or a host nation. Unfortunately, this begs the question: Why not simply deploy one or more additional Army divisions to accomplish the mission? Eventually, technology may permit the MEF to mitigate some of its deficiencies, for example with virtual staffs and long-range naval surface fires; but no evidence suggests that technology will somehow give the MEF a new competitive advantage in sustained operations ashore.

Because it is so unwieldy, the MEF cannot itself perform the Marine Corps' primary function; rather it must conduct amphibious operations by proxy, currently in the form of an *ad hoc* MAGTF. Regrettably, the record shows that MEF training for this eventuality is increasingly unrealistic and infrequent.¹⁴⁷ At the same time, resource constraints have prevented it from overcoming limitations making it unsuited to its acquired function. Further, its distinctive competencies give it no competitive advantage in sustained operations ashore when

¹⁴⁶ See, for example, Richard D. Hooker, Jr., "America's Two Armies," *Joint Force Quarterly*, no. 6 (Autumn/Winter 1994-1995): 38-46; Timothy S. Muchmore, *The Land-Based MEF: Operationally Capable or Situationally Operational?* unpublished research paper (Newport, RI: U. S. Naval War College, February 1991), 20-23; and Peter D. Kopf, *Operational Art and the Marine Expeditionary Force (MEF)*, unpublished research paper (Newport, RI: U. S. Naval War College, June 1993), 25-27.

¹⁴⁷ For TEAMWORK 88, II MEF deployed a MEB aboard seven amphibious ships and one roll-on/roll-off commercial ship. For TEAMWORK 92, it used only 5 amphibious ships and one commercial ship, with much of the MEB deploying by air and being "fairy-dusted" into the exercise at an opportune moment. In 1995, TEAMWORK was replaced by STRONG RESOLVE, which II MEF executed with only a three-ship amphibious ready group. Similarly, the SOLID SHIELD exercises have been eliminated, and the KERNAL USHER/KERNAL BLITZ exercises have been reduced in scope. Several factors contribute to this quantitative and qualitative reduction in amphibious training, including (1) the decline in available amphibious shipping, (2) the decline in Marine Corps end strength, (3) the diversification of Marine Corps capabilities, and (4) the increase in operations tempo since 1989. Author's survey of I MEF and II MEF command chronologies, 1977-1996.

compared with the Army. Thus, the MEF appears neither ideally suited for the Marine Corps' primary function, amphibious operations, nor its acquired function, sustained operations ashore.

As an aside, the MEF also seems oddly unfitted to the strategic environment. If the incidence of major theater war declines in the future as many predict, then the future holds less opportunity for employment of the MEF than the past. But the record of the twentieth century shows that the complete MEF, or its predecessor, engaged in combat only about once every ten years. Meanwhile, the Marine Corps provided smaller MAGTFs—most often MEUs—perhaps 130 times during the Cold War. Since the Gulf War, Marines responded to the call of the National Command Authorities approximately once every five weeks.¹⁴⁸ The MEF has served primarily as a force provider during this period. One wonders why the Marine Corps invests so much in cultivating and expanding the role of the “MEF as Warfighter” when history suggests that the MEF, essentially a decennial force, will seldom be a warfighter.

Renaissance of the MEB. Deactivated in the early 1990s, the standing Marine Expeditionary Brigade (MEB) is currently a footnote in Marine Corps history. Casualty of end strength reductions, it was displaced by the amorphous MEF (Forward) as the Marine Corps' mid-sized MAGTF. It remains a sentimental favorite, however, as a steady stream of *Marine Corps Gazette* articles favoring its renaissance suggests.¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁸ U. S. Marine Corps, *Making Marines & Winning Battles*, 2.

¹⁴⁹ R. Scott Moore, “Rethinking the MAGTF,” *Marine Corps Gazette* 76, no. 6 (June 1992): 20-24; Stephen R. Shea, “The Case for Retaining the Amphibious MEB Command Element,” *Marine Corps Gazette* 76, no. 8 (August 1992): 34-35; Will Brown, “Reengineering the MEB,” *Marine Corps Gazette* 77, no. 7 (July 1993): 32-33; Andrew F. Mazzara, “Integrating the MAGTF into Joint Operations,” *Marine Corps Gazette* 78, no. 7 (July 1994): 65-68; and John T. Quinn, “The Future Fleet Landing Force,” *Marine Corps Gazette* 80, no. 6 (June 1996): 23-25.

While downsizing resulted in elimination of the MEB, downscoping ironically prescribes its restoration in an updated form. Compared to the present alternatives, the MEB is ideally sized and structured to conduct amphibious operations across the conflict spectrum. As already mentioned, the MEU is a versatile, capable amphibious force, coveted by the theater commanders-in-chief. With little or no tailoring, it fits naturally in a service strategy that refocuses on the core functions of amphibious and security operations. But its capabilities are rapidly exceeded at higher levels of conflict; thus, reemphasis on amphibious operations also demands a more potent standing MAGTF. The MEF is too ponderous to meet this need; and the current method of forming “embarkable” *ad hoc* MAGTFs is unsatisfactory, for they lack the experience, proficiency, and cohesion necessary to execute the most difficult operation in warfare. An updated, standing MEB represents the best replacement for the MEF as the basic fighting MAGTF in a Marine Corps refocused on its core functions.

Restructuring the Marine Corps around standing MEBs—“brigading,” as some disparagingly describe it—not only best accommodates the strategy advocated herein, but also acknowledges an emerging view of future war. Futurists generally agree that technological trends such as networked communications, global positioning, and precision munitions portend the flattening of military organizations.¹⁵⁰ Improved command and control systems promise to empower commanders, who will be able to control greater numbers of subordinate units effectively in the future. Additionally, improved targeting, cooperative engagement, and

¹⁵⁰ Friedman and Friedman, 377-394; Martin van Creveld, *The Transformation of War* (New York: The Free Press, 1991), 192-223; and Douglas A. Macgregor, *Breaking the Phalanx: A New Design for Landpower in the 21st Century* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1997), 69-86.

precision munitions promise to increase markedly the combat power of more compact fighting organizations.

The need for stability, cohesion, and readiness in amphibious forces also points to renaissance of the MEB. While the MEF is no doubt a stable, cohesive, and ready force, its size and capabilities simply exceed the requirements of contingencies in which Marine forces are most frequently engaged. The MEU satisfies many of the nation's contingency needs, but not all. Examples of contingencies suited to larger MAGTFs are legion.¹⁵¹ In these instances, the MEF typically forms a MEF (Forward) or Special Purpose MAGTF (SPMAGTF), generally with *ad hoc* command and combat service support elements. Thrown together under adverse circumstances, the resulting MAGTFs are neither stable, nor cohesive. They also waste valuable and limited time taking care of pre-deployment administrative details such as refining troop lists, joining individuals, screening health records, and issuing equipment. The current system that uses the MEF as a force provider for most contingencies hardly promotes optimal readiness of the force structure. In summary, a Marine Corps of standing MEUs and MEBs is better structured to serve a Marine Corps refocused on amphibious operations and meet the contingency requirements expected in a chaotic world.

¹⁵¹ Consider, for example, Operations URGENT FURY, JUST CAUSE, PROVIDE COMFORT, RESTORE HOPE, and SEA ANGEL, all of which included participation of roughly brigade-sized MAGTFs.

CHAPTER 5

ASTIGMATIC CORPS?

The Marine Corps exists to contribute to the nation's security. How it contributes is determined by a variety of factors including the law governing the armed forces, the national security strategy, and the service's strategic plan. Among other things, the Corps' strategic plan must respond effectively and efficiently to the fundamental question: What will the Marine Corps do?

No doubt the Corps' strategic concept must include many capabilities. The complexity of conflict demands diversity in military capabilities, but resource constraints limit diversity; this creates tension. An objective of strategic planning should be to resolve this tension by finding and maintaining optimal diversity in service functions and capabilities. Chapters 2 and 3 demonstrated that optimal diversity is a function of external environmental factors and internal organizational characteristics, many of which escape the control of the strategist. Thus, strategic planning at the service level implies the need to monitor and adjust accordingly, based on a continuing appreciation of the environment.

Geostrategic events have altered the environment in which the Marine Corps operates, increasing the marginal costs associated with preparing forces, procuring equipment, and informing decisions. The *Goldwater-Nichols Department of Defense Reorganization Act of 1986* altered institutional imperatives, ensuring the primacy of the joint task force in military operations. This decreases the marginal benefits of service diversity. Yet, there is little evidence to suggest the Marine Corps has both perceived and adjusted to its changed external environment. Moreover, the Marine Corps has grown more diverse, altering and broadening its

focus with deleterious effect on its core functions. Much of its force structure has grown too large for amphibious operations. And evidence suggests that realistic training in amphibious operations has declined in this decade. In fact, the Marine Corps is arguably too broadly focused in the 1990s. The resulting inefficiencies manifest themselves in fiscal difficulty and, perhaps eventually, weakened readiness. The correct response given the prospect of zero-growth budgets is strategic restructuring. Simple downsizing, one possible approach, will fail. It will compound the Marine Corps' strategic dilemma because it will not restore strategic focus and will not promote the concentration of investment in core functions. Downscoping, the process of reducing the diversified scope of Marine Corps capabilities and activities, represents a rational and effective approach to correcting overdiversification.

Quo Vadis?

The key to downscoping, as indicated in Chapter 4, is revalidating and then reemphasizing attractive core functions: amphibious operations and security operations, in the case of the Marine Corps. Identifying and then emphasizing distinctive competencies is a means to this end, ensuring that the Marine Corps cultivates and employs those resources that create competitive advantage in its core functions. *Operational Maneuver from the Sea* (OMFTS) represents a good conceptual step toward revitalizing amphibious warfare in the Marine Corps. Similarly, the MV-22 Osprey, joint strike fighter, and advanced amphibious assault vehicle all represent good, if expensive, programmatic steps in this direction. However, the Corps must reduce further the scope of its capabilities to concentrate resources in support of its principal Title 10 functions. Chapter 4 suggested several candidates for elimination, but the key lesson is to divest capabilities not related to core functions and not derived from distinctive competencies.

Evidence shows that organizational structure must also change to facilitate implementation of a new strategy. Downscoping thus implies the need to restructure the Fleet Marine Force centered on standing Marine Air-Ground Task Forces (MAGTFs) that are capable of performing the Marine Corps' core functions without resort to *ad hoc* task organizations. Given that the Marine Corps exists primarily "to study and perfect amphibious warfare," it needs standing MAGTFs designed, trained, equipped, *and prepared* to execute amphibious operations on short notice as part of a joint task force. The primacy of the Marine Expeditionary Force (MEF), too large to embark amphibious shipping as a cohesive MAGTF, defies logic given the Marine Corps' legislated functions. The Marine Expeditionary Unit and the Marine Expeditionary Brigade represent the natural forms for the Corps' warfighting MAGTFs, and they embody the organizational structures that will best facilitate a strategy that refocuses on core functions.

Criticism of the MEF is unpopular but necessary, for it aids in revealing the predicament in which the Marine Corps finds itself. The Corps must reduce the diversified scope of its activities or consider the probable consequences. First, in the absence of restructuring, the current diversified scope of Marine Corps capabilities will dilute investment undesirably and likely result in declining long-term performance. Second, it will lead to declining competitive advantage as the Corps concentrates on functions that do not exploit distinctive competencies. Lastly, the Marine Corps risks growing redundant if it continues to emphasize an acquired function in sustained operations ashore and ignore the demands of its eroding core functions. Marine Corps doctrine, policy, culture, and publicity make much of the Corps' role as the "force-in-readiness." Without denying the importance of this role, the Marine Corps cannot claim a monopoly on readiness in 1980s and 1990s. The Corps can, however, claim an effective

monopoly on amphibious operations, which must serve as its focus of effort. Ultimately, the Marine Corps can be the “force-in-readiness” for America only if it is first the “force-in-readiness” for amphibious operations.

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